



## **Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate**

Diocese of Ireland, Scotland, N.E. England,  
And Affiliated Regions.

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## **Statement about the Latest Massacre of Christians in Egypt**

The Coptic Orthodox Church is the Christian Church of Egypt and the oldest Christian Church in the world. The word 'Copt' refers to 'Christian Egyptian', be it Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant. Since Egypt was converted to Islam by force in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Copts have been living under ruthless persecution.

This persecution that began centuries ago continues today, the only difference being the use of modern weaponry instead of swords and daggers.

The Coptic Church celebrates Christmas on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January since it uses the Julian calendar. On Christmas Eve, the 6<sup>th</sup> of Jan 2010, while worshippers were leaving the Church of St George in Southern Egypt (Nag Hamadi), after the midnight Mass, three Muslim terrorists drove by and opened fire from machine guns. Six Copts, aged between 16 and 29, were killed instantly, and tens of others were seriously injured. The Egyptian police, unsurprisingly, did not respond until long after this massacre had left its young victims giving their last breaths in the arms of their shocked and heart-broken families and loved ones. The three perpetrators fled the scene unchallenged.

Furthermore, after the funeral Mass of the six slain victims, Muslims attacked, destroyed and set fire to shops, businesses and homes owned by Christians in the same village.

Subsequently the three murderers handed themselves in to the police and are now awaiting trial. The three of them are well-known "guns for hire". No enquiry was launched to bring the real perpetrators, who hired them, to justice.

This latest massacre and savage attack on Christians brings to mind the New Year massacre in 2000 where twenty one Copts were killed on New Year's Eve in the village of Kosheh, again for no other reason other than their religious beliefs, a basic right recognized by all civilized societies and nations. The perpetrators of that massacre were 'acquitted' by the legal system that continuously supports and indeed encourages such atrocities against Christians.

Copts have been through a long history of persecution and ethnic and religious discrimination which is recorded in the reports of the UN and many non-governmental and Human Rights organizations. To this day, Christians in Egypt are still persecuted. Some examples of this persecution include, but are not limited to:

- Physical and violent persecution ranging from inflicting bodily harm to brutal murder. This is the Egyptian form of Jihad against the 'infidels', i.e. Christians and indeed all non-Muslims.
- Ethnic cleansing where Muslims drive Christians out of villages and towns by attacking, destroying and setting fire to their homes and businesses.
- Ongoing kidnapping of young Christian girls and converting them to Islam by force. This is a rapidly growing phenomenon supported by the police. Never has any kidnapper been brought to justice or even arrested.

- Discrimination against Christians in public and private appointments. They are excluded from certain jobs and positions simply because they are Christians. It is not uncommon to hear Muslim employers saying to the job seekers, 'sorry, we do not hire Christians'. All senior positions in sensitive government agencies such as the police, the army and so on are beyond the reach of Christians, regardless of their qualifications, experience or capabilities.
- Mental and psychological persecution where Christians are subjected to verbal abuse from even Muslim children. While Irish priests, and indeed Muslim Imam's can walk freely in the streets of any Irish city or town, the Christian clergy in Egypt actually never walk in the street, never take a taxi or use public transport because of all the abuse they would suffer.
- Denying Christians their right to exercise their religious beliefs and to build churches for worship. It is extremely difficult to build new churches in Egypt. Furthermore, the rapidly growing phenomenon of setting churches on fire is anything but uncommon in Egypt.

The Egyptian State plays a major role in this systematic and continuous persecution of Christians in Egypt. As Christians have been excluded from senior positions in state agencies, and as the Islamic fundamentalism continues to flourish in Egypt, this has resulted in the much-feared Islamic fundamentalism infiltrating all the agencies and departments of the government in Egypt. In fact, 'Islamic extremism' is one of the main 'exports' of Egypt. If you take the time to look at the list of the most notorious leaders of Islamic terrorism worldwide, you will soon see that many of them are Egyptians, or were taught and led by Egyptian Muslims.

As the Egyptian State itself upholds, primarily, discriminatory beliefs and classifies Coptic Christians as 'second class citizens', it is not surprising to see the state actively inciting, encouraging, supporting and protecting religious and ethnic discriminatory activities and persecutory measures against Christians:

- Starting with children from a very young age, the curriculum taught in schools and colleges in Egypt explicitly and openly promotes hatred against Christians. Children are taught that Christians are 'infidels' and should be treated as such.
- The Egyptian government has always shown its unwillingness, on numerous occasions, to address the issue of the persecution of Coptic Christians, which is, in a way, understandable since it plays a major role in promoting it in the first place. It rarely happens that, when Christians are murdered, any one is even charged, not to mention sentenced.
- The Egyptian State-controlled media, actively promotes hatred and discrimination against Christians (as well as Western societies). There is a plethora of TV and radio programmes that incite hatred against Christians. Their message is open and clear: Christians are infidels, Jihad against them is the responsibility of every Muslim, and the ultimate goal is to cleanse Egypt of them.

The Egyptian government, and primarily the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has a supply of standard answers whenever asked about the Coptic situation. It claims that each of these incidents is separate and that they are not driven by hatred, racism or ethnic discrimination. It portrays an unfair and untrue view of reality in Egypt... the reality of Coptic blood shed on the steps of churches, of Coptic houses burnt down, of Coptic orphans crying for their massacred parents, of Coptic parents grieving over their young sons and daughters slain for no other reason but their religious beliefs and ethnic origin.

The above-mentioned facts are well documented, not only by modern Christian historians and reporters, but also by many international human rights organizations. In fact, many NGO's, as well as countries, have been trying to put pressure on the Egyptian government to put an end to this methodical and organized discrimination and persecution.

While we live in Ireland in peace in a democratic society, we can but empathize with our persecuted

families, friends and loved ones. We might not be Irish by birth, but we are certainly Irish by belonging. We call upon Ireland, our new homeland, upon you, and upon all those who believe in man's basic rights to support the Copts and their cause, their right to exist, to believe, to worship and to be ordinary citizens in their home country.

Thank you in advance for your much-needed support.

Yours sincerely,

**Irish Coptic communities in Ireland**