

Egypt's Christians, attacked for supporting coup leader, await rebuilding

by [Louisa Loveluck](#) in the [December 10, 2014](#) issue

([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) At the Amir Tadros Church in Minya, worshipers pray in what amounts to a building site. Nestled among the scaffolding, a bright blue sign proclaims that work will be completed by June. This past June.

The church in this Upper Egyptian city of a quarter million people, home to one of the largest concentrations of Egypt's Coptic Christian minority, was one of dozens of Christian properties and places of worship destroyed across Egypt on August 14, 2013.

In Minya, mobs chanting Islamist slogans led the charge, looting and burning in response to a state-led massacre unfolding 150 miles away in Cairo, where Muslim Brotherhood-backed demonstrators were protesting the military coup that overthrew the democratically elected Islamist president, Mohamed Morsi.

Egypt's Christian community, about 10 percent of the country's 84 million people, usually defers to the authority of the leader of the day, wary of marginalizing itself further. But the Coptic Church, representing the majority of Egypt's Christians, threw its weight behind Morsi's overthrow. Pope Tadros even stood behind Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, then the army chief and now president, as he announced the military's takeover in a televised address.

By sunrise that August 15, the Amir Tadros Church had been reduced to four scorched walls, encasing only rubble and ash. Although Egypt's army has promised to rebuild this and other churches, there's been little progress. By some estimates, only 10 percent of the work has been completed nationwide.

In recent comments to state media, Bishop Makarios of Minya has affirmed that the rebuilding is ongoing and asked for more security around church buildings. Calls to the Egyptian Defense Ministry elicited no response.

A walk through downtown Minya reveals the haphazard nature of the rebuilding plan. On one street stands a Christian-owned orphanage, its grounds and interior still gutted. Up the road, children's laughter echoes from the playground of the

newly rebuilt Sisters of St. Joseph school.

“There’s no transparency,” said Nady Khalil, general coordinator at a Catholic development organization in Minya. “From time to time we hear the army will rebuild something else, but no one explains when it will happen or how it will be funded.”

Privately owned Christian properties are faring better. Most have been rebuilt with local money. Shop owners say they did not expect help from the state but were disappointed when their insurance companies did not pay out.

“We had to turn to the people,” said restaurant owner Maged Amin. “It was a very difficult time.”

Flames had eaten away at his restaurant’s foundations, costing his family 25,000 Egyptian pounds (\$3,500) to rebuild.

“I’m just thankful they’re rebuilding our churches, no matter how slow the pace,” Amin said. “Last winter, we had to pray in a school—I could not imagine back then that this was my country.”

To date Egyptian Christians’ loyalty has not brought a significant improvement in their day-to-day lives. Sectarian attacks—often attributed to the Muslim Brotherhood—continue, and the security services maintain a poor record when it comes to preventing violence against Christians.

According to the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, a Cairo-based monitoring group, at least 18 Christians were killed because of their religious identity between June 30, 2013, and September 30, 2014. Further, 165 Christian-owned houses were vandalized or burned down.

Crimes against Christians have routinely gone unpunished, whether under ousted dictator Hosni Mubarak, Morsi, or el-Sisi. While a Minya judge sentenced hundreds of local residents to death over the killing of two policemen on August 14, 2013, not a single person has been prosecuted for the burning of the churches. Minya’s attorney general declined to discuss the matter.

Many of Minya’s Christian residents say they are not in a position to ask for more.

“We have to be satisfied with this—minority communities can only expect so much,” said Marco Adel, a young political activist.

“Of course I’m not entirely happy with the government’s efforts, but you have to understand, the current situation is a lot better than it was under Morsi,” he said. “Egypt is now a country that Christians believe they can live in.”

Khalil, of the Catholic development organization, takes a different view.

“The problems have been the same under Mubarak, Morsi, and el-Sisi,” he says. “There is no hope for Egypt if we just rebuild the churches. Unless we invest in people and their institutions, nothing will ever change.”

*Mohamed Ezz contributed to this report.*

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