
Bishop Morcos: Attacks on Egypt's Christians Are Rising

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Bishop Morcos

CAIRO — A senior Egyptian Coptic bishop said on Friday attacks on Christians are on the rise and criticised the inclusion of only one Copt in Islamist President Mohamed Morsi's government.

"The general climate is turning against Christians," said Bishop Morcos. "Assaults on Christians have increased. It's not just a matter of having one ministry," he told AFP.

On Wednesday, Muslims attacked a church and Christian homes in a village outside Cairo, leading to clashes that injured 16 people after a Muslim man died of wounds from a fight with a Christian.

A day later, President Morsi, who had pledged to include Coptic representatives in his government, swore in a new cabinet with only one Christian, the scientific research minister from the outgoing government.

"There is a difference between promises and implementation," said Morcos. "Perhaps there were obstacles in implementing the pledge, or the promise is one thing, and the actual implementation is another."

Dozens of Copts have died in sectarian clashes since a popular uprising overthrew president Hosni Mubarak early last year.

The United States warned on Monday that despite gestures by Egypt's interim military leaders towards greater inclusiveness, sectarian tensions and violence had increased.

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The Copts, who make up roughly 10 percent of Egypt's 82-million-strong population, were also the target of sectarian attacks before Mubarak's ouster.

Muslim-majority Egypt has for decades been marked by deep sectarian tensions, with religious violence between Muslims and Christians often sparked by disputes over land or love affairs between members of the two communities.

In January 2011, a suicide bomber killed more than 20 Christians outside a church in the country's second city Alexandria, after Islamists accused the Coptic Church of detaining a woman who converted to Islam