



Written by [James Heiser](#) on January 11, 2010

Anti-Christian Violence Erupts in Egypt and Malaysia

Although the Christmas day “underwear bomber” Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab has been the focus of a great deal of media attention, and his plot the enabling action for a new round of security measures, attacks on Christian congregations in Egypt and Malaysia have not received similar levels of attention.



In Egypt, where the Coptic Church celebrated Christmas on January 7 (following the old Julian and Coptic calendars), seven people were murdered following midnight Mass. According to press reports, riots then erupted during the funeral processions for six of the seven victims of the massacre. Six of the seven victims were Coptic Christians; the seventh victim was a Muslim.

Coptic Christians make up a mere 10 percent of the population of Egypt, and anti-Christian violence has long been a fact of life for the suffering minority. Attacks on the Coptic community are carried out with the slightest of provocations. [As the MSNBC.com report notes,](#)

In 2000, the deadliest Christian-Muslim clashes in years left 23 people dead. All but two of the 23 were Copts. The clashes were touched off by an argument between a Coptic merchant and a Muslim shopper in the southern village of el-Kusheh.

However, the Christmas massacre was different than much of the persecution that Copts regularly suffer: It appeared to be a planned assault with many victims. Again, according to the MSNBC report:

The latest attack, however, was unusual because it appeared to have been planned, rather than the customary spontaneous violence that arises from misunderstandings or disputes between Muslims and Copts....? Egypt’s Interior Ministry said it suspected that Wednesday’s attack was in retaliation for the alleged November rape of a Muslim girl by a Christian man in the same town. The man is in custody awaiting trial.

But the account takes an even darker turn when it is revealed that not only was the attack possibly a carefully planned assault, but that the bishop of the Nag Hammadi diocese may have been the intended victim. [According to Asianews.it:](#)

Coptic bishop Anba Kirolos was the real target in last Wednesday’s drive-by shooting against a Coptic church in Nag Hammadi. Meanwhile, police [have] found one of the car[s] used by gunmen in the attack on the Eve of Orthodox Christmas, but thousands of Christians attending the victims’ funeral slammed law enforcement and pelted police cars with rocks.

"I was the one intended to be assassinated by this plot, and when it failed the criminals turned round and started shooting and finishing off the young ones," Bishop Kirolos of the Nag Hammagi



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Diocese told Middle East Christian Association (MECA) today in an interview.

In the evening of 6 January, at the end of the Christmas vigil, at least three gunmen began spraying bullets from two cars against people filing out of the church.

A security guard and six Christians were killed, mostly young men in their early 20s. A young couple and a 14-years-old boy were also among the dead.

Bishop Kirillos said there had been threats in the days leading up to the Christmas Eve service, a reason he decided to start Mass an hour earlier than normal. "For days, I had expected something to happen on Christmas Eve," he said.

The bishop left the church minutes before the attack. "A driving car swerved near me, so I took the back door," he said. "By the time I shook hands with someone at the gate, I heard the mayhem, lots of machine-gun shots."

According to a Canadian Press account on January 10, three suspects have been taken in to custody:

Three men suspected in the drive-by shooting that left six Christians and one Muslim dead in southern Egypt have denied they were behind the bloody attack on Coptic Christmas Eve, officials said Saturday.

The attack was the worst to target Christians in Egypt in nearly a decade. Gunmen sprayed a group of Coptic Christians leaving a local church after mass on Wednesday night. Six worshippers and a Muslim guard died, and nine people were wounded.

The shooting touched off two days of rioting in which 40 people were arrested, and underscored sectarian tensions in the town of Nag Hamadi, some 40 miles (64 kilometres) north of the famed Luxor ruins.

On Saturday, Christian residents of Bahjora, a village near Nag Hamadi, inspected damage from overnight arson that charred their homes. They blamed Muslims for the attacks.

The three suspects in the Christmas Eve attack surrendered to police on Friday after security forces closed in on their hideout in sugar cane fields outside the town.

Whether or not the men who have been arrested were involved in the massacre, and regardless of whether they constitute the entirety of those who allegedly plotted and executed the attack, the Christmas massacre cannot be viewed in isolation from a systematic pattern of anti-Christian violence that the Egyptian government is either unwilling or unable to stop.

At the same time, Christians in Malaysia are also suffering open persecution following a court decision over a question of translation. According to January 8 Associated Press story:

Religious tensions in Muslim-majority Malaysia turned violent Friday with firebomb attacks on three churches following a court decision that allows Christians to translate God as Allah.

"Allah is only for us," said a poster waved at one of at least two protests outside mosques in Kuala Lumpur on Friday, the Muslim holy day.

Many Muslims are angry about a Dec. 31 High Court decision overturning a government ban on Roman Catholics' using "Allah" for God in the Malay-language edition of their main newspaper, the *Herald*.

The ruling also applies to the ban's broader applications, such as Malay-language Bibles, 10,000



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copies of which were recently seized by authorities because they translated God as Allah.

"We will not allow the word Allah to be inscribed in your churches," a speaker shouted over a loudspeaker at the Kampung Bahru mosque.

The *Herald* says its Malay edition is read mainly by Christian indigenous tribes in the remote states of Sabah and Sarawak.

But the government contends that making Allah synonymous with God may confuse Muslims and ultimately mislead to them into converting to Christianity, a punishable offense in Malaysia despite a constitution that guarantees freedom of religion.

It suggests using "Tuhan," but Christians say Tuhan is more like "Lord," and can't replace "Allah."

The notion that Malaysians will somehow wander into a Church by accident and become Christians is, of course, laughably absurd. As in Egypt, Christians make up a small minority of the population of Malaysia: about nine percent. Unlike in countries where substantially larger Christian communities seem unwilling to assert their legal rights, Christians in Egypt and Malaysia are not prepared to just acquiesce to such discrimination and persecution, and they are receiving support from other Christians living under Muslim rule. Thus, according to the AP article:

Bassilius Nassour, a Greek Orthodox bishop in Damascus, called the Malaysian government's position "shameful."

"It shows Malaysia to be a backward, pagan state because God teaches freedom for everyone, and the word 'Allah' is for everyone," he said.

The extent to which Christian leaders in the nations formerly known as "Christendom" will also speak out to denounce such anti-Christian violence remains to be seen.



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