



Egypt

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Escalation of inter-confessional violence in Egypt

On Saturday May 8, 2011, violent clashes between Muslims and Christians took place in Imbaba, a popular neighborhood in Cairo, resulting in the deaths of at least 12 people and more than 200 injured. The two communities clashed after Muslims attacked the Coptic Saint Mena church to free a Christian woman they alleged was being held against her will because she wanted to convert to Islam.

Inter-confessional confrontations have been occurring for several years in Egypt but it seems are now escalating into greater violence as the clashes have begun to involve fire arms.

The army, obviously cautious not to engage in sectarian violence as shown in a similar incident that took place in the Moqattam neighborhood two months ago, was deployed on the scene but did not intervene during the clashes. This calls into question the ability of the army and the police to ensure the protection of the population, according to FIDH's member organisations in Egypt.

One hundred and ninety people were arrested by the military police. FIDH is concerned that the people under arrest are facing trials in military courts where they may get heavy sentences, including the death penalty in application of the new « anti-thuggery » as well as the anti-terrorism legislative provisions, without their right to a fair trial being fully guaranteed.

FIDH urges the Egyptian authorities to open independent investigations into the clashes that occurred in Imbaba and to prosecute those responsible for the crimes and offenses that were perpetrated, in accordance with international human rights provisions. FIDH urges the Egyptian authorities to end the military trials of civilians and to refer those arrested in Imbaba to ordinary criminal courts. FIDH urges the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to take peaceful and necessary measures to avoid the escalation of violence and to ensure public order, in particular during the subsequent popular protests that are expected to take place.

<http://www.fidh.org/Escalation-of-inter-confessional-violence-in>