



## The Maspero Massacre - October 9, 2011

- On October 9<sup>th</sup> of 2011, amidst the chaos of Egypt's first January 25, 2011 revolution, a Coptic Orthodox church near Aswan, Upper Egypt, was demolished by local Islamist Salafists. The Islamist extremists had demanded Aswan's Copts remove any visible Christian symbols including crosses, bells, and steeples from the church structure. Tension soared when Copts in the area refused to abide by these demands.
- To avoid escalation of the conflict, the governor of Aswan, Mustafa Kamel el-Sayyed, organized a meeting between Salafist and Coptic leaders in an effort to reach an agreement. When mediation efforts failed, Islamist Salafists threatened violence. Eventually, local Salafists demolished the church while the governor denied the existence of the church. He later walked back those claims but asserted that it did not have a proper construction permit and thus was deemed to be illegal. The government's mishandling of the issue ultimately sparked the Maspero demonstrations.
- Thousands of peaceful demonstrators—the majority of whom were Copts—marched from the Shoubra neighborhood in northern Cairo to the Maspero building through hostile Muslim crowds. They had originally planned to converge in front of the state-run television station, Maspero.
- As the demonstrators approached their destination, they were attacked by Islamist fanatic mobs that laid in wait for them and hurled stones at them from the top of traffic bridges.
- Egyptian Army forces intercepted the demonstrators who found themselves caught between Islamists mobs and the Egyptian Army which soon attacked them using riot gear, batons, live ammunition and armored vehicles which were used to brutally murder the demonstrators by running them over.
- As stated in a 2014 Coptic Solidarity press release: “Fueling the melee, state owned television station broadcast news-alerts that Coptic Christians were attacking the Egyptian military, and explicitly encouraged ‘good citizens’ to go into the streets to ‘rescue members of the military.’ The State security apparatus forcibly ended live broadcasts of the massacre by two independent TV stations in an effort to prevent the people from seeing the actual event.”
- The Egyptian army's brutal confrontation with the crowd left 28 demonstrators dead and 327 injured. Twenty-seven of those killed were Copts. 14 of them were murdered by the armored vehicles.
- Outcomes:
  - Footage of the incident spread worldwide and became another grim reminder of the struggle faced by Christians in Egypt and throughout the Middle East
  - Accounts from interviews and social media began to contradict official reports as the Egyptian Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) tried to downplay and even reverse accusations made about the whole incident which was orchestrated by the state.
  - To date, only two low-ranking soldiers were found guilty of a misdemeanor of “involuntary killing.” Both remain free and continue to serve in their army unit.
  - A Coptic demonstrator was convicted of “aggression against Army personnel.”
  - The massacre is still not officially recognized as such by the government while investigations have been inconclusive.
  - Autopsy reports performed per the Coptic church's request and with the agreement of the victims' families confirmed the carnage reported.
- Coptic Solidarity continues to call on Egypt's government to render justice by holding those responsible accountable and urges to make October 9<sup>th</sup> a Day for Commemoration of the victims.