

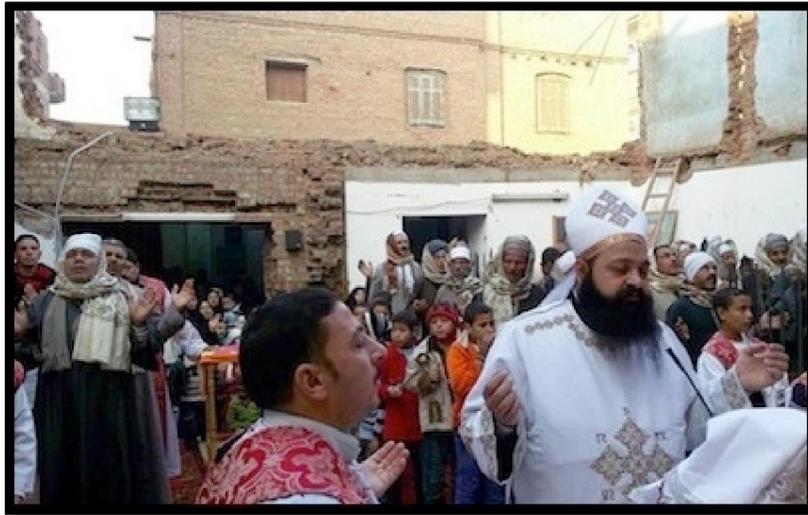
# Egypt's 'Security Threat': Churches

by Raymond Ibrahim

[The Gatestone Institute](#)

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On February 1, Tharwat Bukhit, a Coptic Christian member of Egypt's parliament, [announced](#) "there are approximately 50 churches in Egypt closed for reasons of security."



When the "Arab Spring" broke out in 2011, Egypt's Christians compiled a list of 43 churches that had been shut down by local authorities over the years. This list was given to the prime minister of Egypt at the time, Dr. Essam Sharaf, who said that the churches would be opened as soon as possible. Yet since then, according to Bukhit, "Today, the number of closed churches has grown to almost 50."

Why are Christian churches being "closed for reasons of security"? Whenever Christians attempt to repair, renovate, or build a church -- all of which [contradict Islamic law\[1\]](#) -- the same chain of events follows. Local Muslims riot and rampage, and local (Muslim) officials conclude that the only way to prevent "angry youths" from acts of violence is to ban the church, which is then declared a "threat" to security.

**Whenever Egyptian Christians attempt to repair or build a church, local Muslims riot and rampage.**

Such events have occurred repeatedly throughout Egypt. For instance, Abdel Fattah Sisi, Egypt's president, agreed to build a memorial church in the village of Al-Our, which was home to 13 of the 21

Christians [beheaded in February 2015](#) by the Islamic State in Libya. The families of the victims still live there. After Islamic prayers on Friday, April 3, 2015, [Muslim mobs](#) from

Al-Our village [violently protested](#) Sisi's decision. They yelled that they would never allow a church to be built. They chanted, "Egypt is Islamic!" and then attacked a Coptic church with Molotov cocktails and stones. Cars were set on fire, including one belonging to the family of a Christian beheaded by the Islamic State. Several people were seriously hurt.

In Sohag City, a similar chain of events took place. After waiting 44 years, the Christians of Nag Shenouda were issued the necessary permits to build a church. According to a 2015 [report](#), local Muslims rioted and burned down the temporary worship tent. When a Christian tried to hold a religious service in his home, a Muslim mob [attacked](#) it. Denied a place to worship, the Christians of Nag Shenouda celebrated Easter 2015 in the street.

In a separate incident, also after waiting years, the Christians of Gala' village finally received formal approval to begin restoring their dilapidated church (see pictures [here](#)). Soon after, on April 4, 2015, [Muslims rioted](#), hurling stones at Christian homes, businesses and persons. Christian-owned wheat farms were destroyed and their potato crops uprooted. The usual Islamic slogans were shouted: "Islamic! Islamic!" and "There is no God but Allah!"

In July 2015, [Muslims suspended prayer in a church](#) in the village of Arab Asnabt. They called for the church to be demolished as part of an effort "to prevent Coptic Christians from practicing their religious rites."

Repeatedly, Christian leaders accuse local officials of inciting Muslim violence against churches. Muslim leaders then point to this violence to deny the church a permit on the grounds that it has attracted violence.

More recently, [a church](#) under construction in the village of Swada was attacked by a mob of at least 400 Muslims, possibly incited by local officials. After the attack, the church was

**Christian leaders accuse local officials of inciting Muslim violence against churches.**

closed by the same officials who had previously granted the necessary permits required for its construction. The 3,000 Coptic Christians in Swada, who make up approximately 35% of the population, do not have even one Coptic Orthodox Church to serve them.

This year, on February 1, the same day as Coptic Christian MP Tharwat Bukhit said nearly 50 churches had been shut down, the priest of St. Rewis Church [described](#) how, on the first day Christians met to worship in a fellow Christian's home that he had transformed into a church, "Muslims prevented them so that the church was closed on the very day it was opened."

On February 2, Father Lucas Helmi, an official of the Franciscan Order in Egypt, [explained](#) how "the closure of St. George's Church in the village of Hijazah in Qous [shuttered 25 years earlier] goes back to tensions between Coptic and Muslim

families in the village, especially the Muslim neighbors around the old church, which is still unfinished because they refused to allow it to be rebuilt after it was demolished."

During a 25-minute [interview](#) on Arabic satellite TV, Bishop Agathon [revealed](#)<sup>[2]</sup> how, after an official council meeting with government leaders on the possibility of building a church, one of the authorities contacted the Islamic sheikhs of the village. The official asked the sheikhs if they stood "with the Coptic church or with the State?"

The sheikhs apparently told the Muslim households to each send one family member to protest the building of the church. Security officials could then point to the "rioting mob" and, as usual, on grounds of security, ban the church.

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[1] According to the Conditions of Omar, a Medieval Muslim text that delineates the debilitations Christians must accept in order not to be killed by an Islamic state, Christians are commanded "Not to build a church in our city· nor a monastery, convent, or monk's cell in the surrounding areas· and not to repair those that fall in ruins or are in Muslim quarters; Not to clang our cymbals except lightly and from the innermost recesses of our churches; Not to display a cross on them [churches], nor raise our voices during prayer or readings in our churches anywhere near Muslims..." See [Crucified Again](#), pgs. 24-30.

[2] In his May 2015 interview, Bishop Agathon made many remarks accusing the Egyptian government of being behind the persecution of Christians in Egypt· including the rampant kidnapping of Christian children. A translation of his remarks can be [read here](#).

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