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Egypt recalls Vatican ambassador

Francis X. Rocca Religion News Service | Jan. 13, 2011

VATICAN CITY -- The government of Egypt recalled its ambassador to the Vatican Jan. 11 to protest a demand by Pope Benedict XVI that it better protect the country?s embattled Christian minority.

The Egyptian foreign ministry said in a statement that its ambassador, Lamia Aly Hamada Mekhemar, had been recalled because the pope?s demands represented an ?unacceptable interference in its internal affairs.?

In an address to foreign ambassadors at the Vatican on Jan. 10, the pope noted recent violence against Christians in the Middle East, including a car bomb outside a Christian Coptic church in Alexandria, Egypt, that killed at least 21 people on New Year?s Day.

Benedict then called on ?governments of the region to adopt ... effective measures for the protection of religious minorities.? He quoted a recent statement by Catholic bishops that Christians in the Middle East ?should enjoy all the rights of citizenship, freedom of conscience, freedom of worship and freedom in education, teaching and the use of the mass media.?

According to a Vatican statement issued late Tuesday, Mekhemar met at the Vatican with Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, who is effectively the Holy See?s foreign minister.

The Egyptian ambassador ?made clear her government?s concerns in the difficult present moment,? the Vatican statement said, and she was given information to convey to Cairo ?on the recent interventions by the Holy Father, particularly about religious liberty and the protection of Christians in the Middle East.?

When he accepted the ambassador?s credentials in 2008, Benedict praised Egypt as ?a land of hospitality for many refugees, Muslims and Christians, who have sought security and peace in its territory.?

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