NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Pope condemns attack on Christians in Egypt

Cindy Wooden Catholic News Service | Oct. 12, 2011

VATICAN CITY -- Condemning an attack on unarmed Christians in Egypt, Pope Benedict XVI said that during the country's transition to democracy, all of its citizens and institutions must work to guarantee the rights of minorities.

At the end of his weekly general audience Oct. 12, Pope Benedict said he was "profoundly saddened" by the deaths Oct. 9 of at least 26 people, mostly Christians, after peaceful protesters were attacked by gangs, and then a speeding military vehicle ran into them and officers fired on the crowd. Hundreds of people were injured.

The pope said Egypt, which has been transitioning to democracy since the February ousting of President Hosni Mubarak, has been "lacerated by attempts to undermine peaceful coexistence among its communities."

Safeguarding harmony and cooperation is essential for a future of true democracy, he said.

The pope asked Catholics to pray that Egypt would "enjoy true peace based on justice and respect for the freedom and dignity of every citizen."

"In addition, I support the efforts of Egyptian civil and religious authorities in favor of a society in which the human rights of all -- especially minorities -- are respected to the benefit of national unity," the pope said.

Christians make up about 10 percent of Egypt's population; 90 percent of its 82 million inhabitants are Muslim.

Comboni Father Luciano Verdoscia, a missionary in Egypt, said that over the past 40 years successive governments have exploited differences between Christians and Muslims in the country, and tensions were increased by money and influence from Islamic groups outside the country.

But Father Verdoscia said Western countries also share some of the blame. "I fear that Western governments are interested in preserving their economic interests at the expense of individual rights. They do not have the ethical strength to denounce discrimination against minorities in Middle Eastern countries," he told Fides, the Vatican's missionary news agency.

Father Rafic Greiche, spokesman for the Catholic Church in Egypt, told Vatican Radio a lack of government activity is partly to blame for the rise in violence.

"It all stems from the government's failure to enact a law that regulates the building of places of worship, be they churches or mosques, which they promised to do months ago," Father Greiche said. The Christian protesters had been rallying to call for an end to attempts to burn down churches that some critics say are being built illegally.

Father Greiche said, "At the time of the old regime of Mubarak, there were also churches being burned and it was the security forces that always used to take care of us. Now even the government does not give a damn about what is happening."

In his main audience talk to about 14,000 people in St. Peter's Square, Pope Benedict spoke about the joy and gratitude reflected in Psalm 126 and how Christians have an obligation to recognize the gifts God have given them and to offer thanks.

"In our prayer we must look more often at how, in the events of our lives, the Lord has protected us, guided us and helped us and we must praise him for what he has done and still does for us. We must be more attentive to the good things the Lord does; we always notice the problems and difficulties -- it's almost like we don't want to see there are good things that come from the Lord," the pope said.

[Contributing to this story was Kristin Gobberg in Rome.]

Source URL (retrieved on *11/29/2015 - 23:07*): http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/pope-condemns-attack-christians-egypt