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## Strengthening National Unity: Rebuilding and Restoring Egypt's Churches

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Since taking office in 2014, President Abdel Fattah El Sisi has made promoting greater religious tolerance and strengthening unity amongst all Egyptians a cornerstone of his agenda. In 2015, President El Sisi made history when he became the first Egyptian head of state to attend Christmas mass at St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Cairo. During the service he declared that Egypt's Muslims and Christians are "one entity." In 2016, while attending Christmas mass again at the same location, President El Sisi vowed to rebuild and restore all churches that had been damaged by acts of terrorism by the operatives of the Muslim Brotherhood organization in the summer of 2013. These horrific acts perpetrated by extremists saw 56 churches, alongside numerous Christian-owned properties, destroyed and damaged.



### PARLIAMENT BUILDING AND RESTORATION OF CHURCHES ACT

On 30 August 2016, Egypt's House of Representatives followed President El Sisi's call to action, in accordance with article 235 of the Constitution, and passed a landmark new law that paves the way for Egypt's Christian community to restore and construct new churches across the country. Passed by a two-thirds majority of Parliament, and supported by the leaders of Egypt's Coptic, Catholic and Anglican churches, the new law helps facilitate the timely construction and licensing of churches. The law also eliminates many of the bureaucratic and legislative obstacles that previously delayed progress. The legislation, which overhauls antiquated rules written during the Ottoman Empire in 1856, also aims to build new bridges of confidence between Christians and Muslims, and foster national unity among all Egyptian citizens.

### KEY PROVISIONS OF THE NEW LAW

- › Simplifies the process of constructing and restoring churches
- › Sets clearly defined procedures and timelines, requiring action on applications by local governors within four months
- › Retroactively grants operating licenses to existing unregistered churches and other Christian places of worship





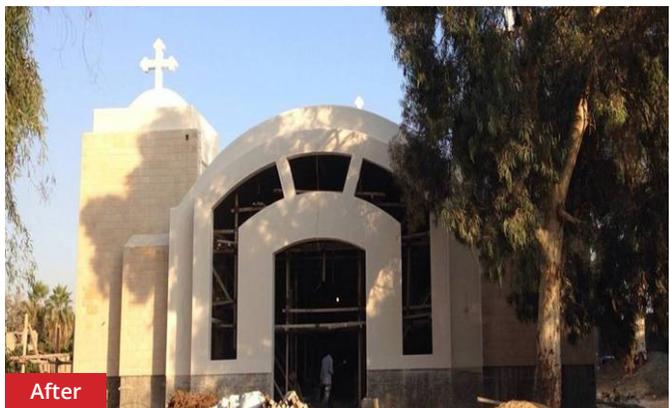
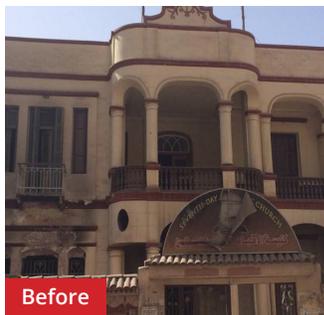
In keeping with Parliament’s responsibility to determine whether current laws live up to Egypt’s progressive new Constitution, passage of the new law by the House of Representatives **guarantees Christians the right to exercise their faith freely in accordance with Article 235 of the 2014 Constitution: “The House of Representatives shall issue a law to regulate constructing and renovating churches, in a manner that guarantees the freedom to practice religious rituals for Christians.”** The first request to build a new church under the new guidelines came from a Muslim Member of Parliament, El-Badri Ahmed Deif, who called for a new church to be constructed in his native governorate of Assiut in Upper Egypt.

**CHURCH RESTORATION EFFORTS**

President Abdel Fattah El Sisi instructed the Armed Forces to restore & rebuild the 56 houses of worship damaged or destroyed by acts of terrorism in the summer of 2013. The multi-phase effort, launched in 2014, is almost halfway complete with 29 more religious facilities expected to be fully restored in the coming months

**Phase (1) - Year 2014**

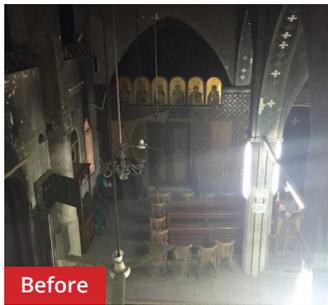
<b>Number</b>	17 Houses of Worship
<b>Governorates</b>	Bani Sowaif   Al Fayoum   Al Menya   Assyout   Sohag
<b>Executive Status</b>	Completed – 31 December 2014
<b>Cost</b>	69.9 Million Egyptian pounds





### Phase (2) - Year 2015

<b>Number</b>	10 Houses of Worship
<b>Governorates</b>	Giza   Al Menya   Assyout
<b>Executive Status</b>	Completed – 14 September 2015
<b>Cost</b>	9.27 Million Egyptian pounds
<b>Delivery Date</b>	14 September 2015



### Phase (3) - Year 2016

<b>Number</b>	29 Houses of Worship
<b>Governorates</b>	Suez   Assyout   Al Menya   Al Fayoum   Giza   North Sinai   Cairo
<b>Executive Status</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Ongoing</li> <li>&gt; 95% of the executive restoration process completed</li> </ul>
<b>Delivery Date</b>	Expected – 31 December 2016

