

WRAP-UP: Arish attack strongly condemned, accents war on terrorism

CAIRO - 24 November 2017: A Friday bomb and gun assault on al-Rawdah mosque in north Sinai killed at least 235 people and injured 109 others.

A group of terrorists stormed the mosque in west Arish City in four off-road vehicles and opened fire on worshipers during Friday prayers after a bomb was detonated, according to eyewitnesses.

Eyewitnesses further added that militants set fire in nearby cars and blocked the road in al-Rawdah Village.

Reported by state media, the death and injury toll kept rising on Friday afternoon as more details got clarified.

Security forces and medical personnel immediately moved to the scene and halted traffic on Arish-Qantara Road, which leads to the damaged mosque, to scout the area and provide medical assistance to the injured.

President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi held an urgent meeting following the attack to stand on its latest developments and issue directives to contain the situation.

President Sisi, in a TV statement, strongly condemned the abhorrent terrorist attack and mourned the victims while extending his condolences to their families.

He added that Egypt will respond to this attack in “brute force against that small band of extremist terrorist”.

The Egyptian leader further added that the “cowardly” attack reflects how much inhumane the perpetrators are, asserting that this will not pass without decisive punishment and that justice will be served against everyone who participated, contributed, supported, funded or incited this attack on worshipers.

The president affirmed that the pain that the Egyptian people are experiencing at this difficult time will not go in vain and that it will fuel their determination to

succeed in the war against terrorism.

The attack is considered by far one of the deadliest attacks in the country's recent memory; it marks major escalation in Cairo's battle against terrorism.

He emphasized that the attacks in Sinai reflect Egypt's efforts against terrorism and that Egypt leads the fight "on its own, and on behalf of the region and the entire world."

"All what is happening is an attempt to stop our efforts in our fight against terror and an attempt to break our will and measures in ending the terrible criminal scheme that aims to destroy what remains of the region," Sisi added.

Addressing the Egyptian people, Sisi said, "The fight you are going through is the most noble and honorable fight of all." He added that the state is steadfast and will continue the fight against terrorism.

Three-day state mourning was announced; meanwhile, international condemnations have been issued in numerous statements worldwide. A total of LE 200,000 (\$11,300) and LE 50,000 will be dispensed to the family of each worshiper whose life has been claimed and each injured victim, respectively.

President Sisi's words already started to come into effect as the Egyptian Air Force conducted air raids targeting terrorist hideouts in mountain areas near the mosque.

Moreover, security forces began large-scale combing operations in Arish City, expanding their inspection around the militant attack area.

The security forces questioned a number of people who witnessed the militant attack.

They intensified a state of security around al-Rawdah mosque in west Arish City where the militant attack occurred, and reinforced ambushes with a number of police elements and modern equipment.

For its part, the Ministry of Justice ordered Director of the Department of Forensic Medicine, Hisham Abdel Hamid, to send a team of forensic doctors, assistants and technicians to North Sinai hospitals, where bodies of the victims were transferred.

Investigations into the attack and its carriers are still being in progress until people who are responsible for the attack are captured and punished.

Later on Friday, the Egyptian Air Force announced that it pursued the perpetrators, destroying a number of pickups used in the atrocity and killing the “terrorists” on board.

Other “terrorist hotbeds” were also discovered and targeted in cooperation between the Air Force and forces on the ground.

A number of entities decried the attack; Egypt’s Coptic Orthodox Church, presided over by Pope Tawadros II, condemned the “brutal” terrorist attack.

“Egypt, with its grandeur, and long standing civilization will be eventually able to ward off such unprecedented terrorism, and Egypt will remain a strong fortress in the face of it,” the statement said. “We regretfully mourn the loss of the martyrs of our nation and our hearts go out to the families of those who are victims of this despicable tragedy while praying for a swift recovery to those who have been injured.”

For his part, Undersecretary of Al-Azhar, Abbas Shoman, emphasized that the Friday attack on the mosque is clear evidence that terrorism must not be associated with Islam and that those criminals are distant from the crux of Islam.

“If Islam is not represented by the mosque, then where else it can be found?” Shoman further denounced, adding that they must stop hiding behind the cloak of Islam.

Moreover, Grand Mufti of Egypt Shawki Allam said that the perpetrators of such deeds must be murdered or crucified; contending that the killing of innocents amounts to committing a “disobedience to Allah and spreading mischief in the land.”

Ahlmad el-Tayyeb, grand Imam of Al-Azhar and chairman of the Muslim Council of Elders, also condemned the attack on a TV statement and asserted that Al-Azhar calls the whole world to stand with Egypt in its war against terrorism.

As for international condemnations regarding the attack, the EU’s foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, condemned the terrorist attack in a statement.

The EU statement that Egypt has been hit by a number of attacks against places of worship of all faiths over the last years, as no one should be killed because of their religion.

“I want to send, on behalf of the EU, my heartfelt condolences to the victims, their families and the Egyptian people,” Mogherini added.

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker also issued statement condemning the attack. “It was with great horror and sadness that I learnt of the tragic attack on the Rawdah Mosque in Sinai. I would like to offer my most sincere condolences to the people of Egypt and to President al-Sisi,” Juncker stated.

He added that he condemns the barbaric and cowardly act in the strongest possible terms, as it targeted peaceful and innocent people in their place of worship. “Europe stands beside you in solidarity, just as you have stood with us in the past. You can count on our support,” Juncker added in his statement.

The White House condemned also condemned the attack calling on the international community to step up efforts to eliminate terrorism worldwide.

“There can be no tolerance for barbaric groups that claim to act in the name of a faith but attack houses of worship and murder the innocent and defenseless while at prayer,” read the statement.

U.S. President Donald Trump described the attack as a “horrible and cowardly terrorist attack on innocent and defenseless worshipers,” adding that the world cannot tolerate terrorism.

“We must defeat them militarily and discredit the extremist ideology that forms the basis of their existence,” Trump tweeted.

President Sisi, later on Friday, received a phone call from Trump, who offered the sincere condolences of the United States for the victims of the abhorrent terrorist attack.

During the phone call, Trump affirmed the full solidarity of the US with Egypt in its war against terrorism and its support and readiness to enhance cooperation with Egypt in this field.

President Sisi affirmed that this attack increases the determination of the Egyptian people to continue their battle against terrorism. He also stressed the importance of concerted international efforts to combat all forms of terrorism and root it out.

French President Emanuel Macron expressed France's sincere condolences over the terror attack over a phone call to President Sisi.

The official spokesman for the presidency, Bassam Radi, said that the French president affirmed his country's full solidarity with Egypt, pointing out France's keenness to intensify cooperation with Egypt to combat terrorism.

The United Arab Emirates UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash also condemned the attack and affirmed that it brings about the necessity of understanding the relation between extremism and terrorism. He clarified that in order to eliminate terrorism, extremism must be fought.

Presidents of various countries, including Hungary, Lebanon, Jordan and Yemen, sent cables of condolences to President Sisi over the attack and expressed support for all measures taken by the country to eliminate terrorism.

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