

Christian surgeon's heart op centre under threat from Muslims in Egypt

Country/Region: Middle East and North Africa, Egypt

A charitable medical centre that performs free heart operations on children in Egypt is under threat from radical Muslims, who want it closed down because it was founded by a Christian surgeon.



Sir Magdi Yacoub is a world renowned cardiothoracic surgeon
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The centre in Aswan city was established by the world-renowned cardiothoracic surgeon, Sir Magdi Habib Yacoub, an Egyptian Christian who emigrated to Britain in 1962. His charitable organisation covers all the centre's costs, and operations are performed on Christian and Muslim children alike free of charge.

The centre's Muslim director was interviewed on Egyptian television about the protests by radical elements in Aswan. She said that closing down the centre, which is licensed and has a government permit to practise, would be a big loss for Egypt.

Sir Magdi, who specialises in surgery on children with congenital heart defects, goes to the centre in Aswan himself to perform operations on needy youngsters. His charity sends teams of medics to various parts of the developing world to treat for free children suffering from heart disease.

The protests against his medical centre follow the election last month of an Islamist president, Mohammed Morsi, in Egypt, which heightened concerns for the future of Christians in the country. Although Mr Morsi has made encouraging noises about being a "president for all Egyptians", and even vowed to appoint a Christian vice-president, it seems that Islamists have been further emboldened by his election to push for their agenda.

Sir Magdi, who was knighted in 1992, qualified as a doctor in Cairo in 1957 with excellent marks but soon experienced discrimination, which prompted him to emigrate. He became a consultant cardiothoracic surgeon at Harefield Hospital in 1973, and under his leadership it became the country's leading transplant centre. Sir Magdi was involved in the first UK heart transplant, and his pioneering research has led to great advancements in heart and lung surgery. He is Professor of Cardiothoracic Surgery at Imperial College London, having retired from the NHS in 2001.