

EGYPT SANCTIONS OPERATORS FOR ILLEGAL PILGRIMAGE TO MECCA



The Egyptian government seriously penalized 16 tourism companies accused of arranging unauthorized pilgrimage to Mecca. These companies permitted Egyptians to take part in the pilgrimage without the necessary visas, resulting in the loss of many worshippers' lives. The harshness of the penalties reflects the magnitude of the scandal and the gravity of the impact on the pilgrims.

The Egyptian authorities not only revoked the licenses of these companies but also brought their officials to court for "fraud." Egyptian Prime Minister Mustafa Madbouli **has ordered that the fines imposed be used to compensate the families of pilgrims who have died as a result of these irresponsible practices.**

The consequences of this fraud were tragic. More than 600 Egyptians died during the pilgrimage to Mecca, almost all without visas. The total number of deaths in this event exceeded 1,100, including many victims of other nationalities. Extreme temperatures, reaching up to 51.8°C, played a decisive role in this tragedy. In the absence of visas, pilgrims did not have access to air-conditioned infrastructure and adequate medical services, which increased their vulnerability to the intense heat.

Between Fraud and Despair

Egyptians have two official options for participating in the Great Pilgrimage: they can be selected through a government draw or through licensed tourism companies. The latter option can be expensive, equivalent to several years of minimum wage.

Some people have tried to avoid these options and have traveled to Saudi Arabia on tourist visas, hoping to participate in the Hajj afterward. This practice, often facilitated by unscrupulous tourism companies, has resulted in many deaths.

Egyptian Victims

Even though Egyptians represent only 5% of pilgrims, they account for more than half of the victims. Several factors, including the extreme conditions of the pilgrimage and the lack of preparation and support for illegal pilgrims, can explain this disproportion. Social networks have revealed apocalyptic scenes: the bodies of pilgrims lying on the ground without shelter or medical care, accentuating the human tragedy.

Reaction of the Saudi and Egyptian Authorities

The Saudi authorities attempted to address the situation by distributing water and ice and suggesting using umbrellas for sun protection. **Unfortunately, these measures proved insufficient to prevent numerous deaths.** Considering this, Egypt has acted against tourism companies that engage in these illegal activities to prevent future tragedies.

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