



5.17.2011

EGYPT International experts warn of rising violence against Christians and inaccurate reporting

A group of experts, advocates and faith leaders with an interest in Egypt, religious freedom and human rights have released a statement expressing concern at the increasing frequency of attacks on Coptic Christians in Egypt, and the manner in which such attacks are being reported by local and international media.

At least sixty people were injured on Saturday evening, when Christians protesting outside Egypt's state television building in Cairo at the attacks on two churches on the previous weekend that left 12 dead were themselves attacked. According to media reports, around 100 people attacked the protesters with stones and petrol bombs, and at least two people sustained gunshot wounds. Fighting continued for several hours before the army moved to restore order.

The letter states, "The collapse of the powerful state apparatus and the subsequent power vacuum this created, however, quickly opened a 'Pandora's Box' of social problems that the Mubarak regime had either maintained or failed to address. As anticipated, we are now witnessing political struggles for power and influence in the new Egypt. While most of this is a necessary part of the emergence of true democracy in Egypt, the increase in and intensity of attacks on Christians are indicators of imminent civil unrest and the potential for widespread ethno-religious violence that demands an immediate response."

The letter highlights the established pattern of the attacks and the lack of action from the Supreme Council of Armed Forces. It continues, "Yet far from upholding the revolutionary spirit of unity we witnessed in January and February, the Armed Forces not only fail to provide adequate protection, but also continue to follow the policy of Mubarak's regime by failing to uphold justice or arrest the real culprits, and by forcing reconciliation meetings on the victims that favor their attackers."

With regards to the inaccurate reporting of the attacks on Christians by both local and international media, the letter states, "Both local and international media reporting of the attacks have been deeply problematic. Mainstream Egyptian media describes such incidents as communal clashes, with at times, inaccurate reports that they are incited by Coptic Christians. Some Islamic media uses harsher and more dangerous tone, with frequent calls to "punish" and ostracize the 10 million strong Coptic community."

"The international media is reporting the attacks as "sectarian clashes". However, these events are not clashes between two sects, such as Sunni and Shiite clashes in Iraq; they constitute a disturbing pattern of escalating attacks and violence against a minority community. Erroneous wording in media reports enable radical groups to continue their aggression, and the Egyptian authorities to remain oblivious and insensitive towards a vulnerable minority."

Notes to Editors:

1. Signatories include:

Ziya Meral; Joseph Crapa Fellow, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Khataza Gondwe; Team Leader, Africa and the Middle East, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Dr Jenny Taylor, Director, Lapido Media, Paul Marshall, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute Center for Religious Freedom, Nina Shea, Director, Hudson Institute Center for Religious Freedom, Dr Elizabeth Iskander; Dinam Research

- Fellow, London School of Economics, Thomas F. Farr, Director, Religious Freedom Project- The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, Oxford Centre for Training, Research, Advocacy & Dialogue, Dr Mariz Tadros, Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Adam Hug, Policy Director, the Foreign Policy Centre, Baroness Caroline Cox, CEO, Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust
2. The Coptic Diaspora in the United Kingdom has organized a peaceful gathering outside the Egyptian embassy in London on 22 May 2011 from 3 to 5pm to protest the escalating attacks against Copts and their churches, and to call for equality, justice and freedom of worship for all Egyptians.
 3. Please click [here](#) to view the statement.