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## GLOBAL | CSW offers condolences on passing of Pope Shenouda III

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Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is saddened to learn of the death yesterday of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, the 117th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of All Africa on the holy Apostolic See of Saint Mark the Evangelist of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "CSW is deeply saddened by the news of the passing of Pope Shenouda III, and we would like to offer our deepest condolences to the Egyptian Church and people at the loss of a key leader at this significant time in the nation's history. Pope Shenouda was a deeply spiritual man who led his Church faithfully for so many years. I was privileged to have an audience with him last September, and was profoundly affected, knowing immediately that I was in the presence of a very special man. My prayer is that over the coming days the Coptic Orthodox Church will be led by the Holy Spirit as they seek to appoint a successor to this very wise and Godly man."

Pope Shenouda, who had led the church since 1971, died following a lengthy period of ill health. According to reports, the pope was obliged to cancel a sermon last week due to health concerns.

In a statement released yesterday, the General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom His Grace Bishop Angaelos, said Pope Shenouda III would "be remembered by his Church as a dedicated servant of God and of the people, a man who faithfully endured through conflict, opposition, and persecution. His Holiness built upon the foundation laid by our Lord Jesus Christ, enhancing the Church in a variety of ways, encouraging a spirit of unity for all of humanity. May his prayers be with us all, and may he find joy and rest in the Kingdom of our gracious Lord."

The funeral will take place on Tuesday, March 20. A book of condolence will be available at the Coptic Orthodox Church Centre in Hertfordshire next week.

Pope Shenouda's death comes at a time of uncertainty for Egypt's Christian community. The period following the fall of the Mubarak regime has seen a marked and continuing increase in attacks on churches and Coptic communities. The killing of around 27 protesters in October 2011 following a mostly Coptic march in Maspero, Cairo, and the rise to power of Islamist parties following electoral victories have added to the communities' anxieties.

However, key Muslim leaders have been quick to offer condolences to the Christian community. Reuters reports Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayib, grand imam of Egypt's highest Islamic authority, al-Azhar, as stating that: "Egypt has lost one of its rare men at a sensitive moment when it most needs the wisest of its wise - their expertise and their purity of minds"

In a message published on Ikhwan Web, Dr. Mohamed Badie, Chairman of the Muslim Brotherhood, said the movement extended "our most sincere and heartfelt condolences and sympathy to our brothers in the homeland and humanity, the Copts of Egypt, each and every one of them, in this especially difficult time, on the loss of His Beatitude Pope Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of Saint Mark. I pray that God help our brothers overcome this painful ordeal, and bring a successor who can faithfully serve and benefit the whole country and keep promoting a sense of unity between all citizens."