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EGYPT | Six Die in Clashes Following Protest at Presidential Palace

Six people have been killed and 600 injured in violent clashes following an opposition sit-in outside the presidential palace in Cairo in protest of the controversial draft constitution and a recent decree that granted President Morsi sweeping powers. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is calling on the UK government to raise concerns about both the decree and draft constitution with the Egyptian government as a matter of urgency.

According to news reports, rocks and gasoline bombs were thrown at protesters. Members of the opposition accused the Muslim Brotherhood of organizing the violence. On Dec. 6, the Republican Guard deployed tanks outside the presidential palace.

The government has signaled its intention to proceed with a referendum on Dec. 15 on the draft constitution, which does not offer adequate protection for political or religious freedoms, or equal rights for women. The draft constitution was rushed through parliament without proper consultation after members of opposition parties and church representatives withdrew from the drafting process in protest.

Seven presidential staff members have resigned since President Morsi passed a decree on Nov. 22 granting himself sweeping powers and giving himself immunity from judicial challenges to his decisions. Earlier this week, thousands of Egyptians protested at the decree and draft constitution in Cairo, Alexandria and other cities across Egypt.

The UK Foreign Secretary William Hague has called for restraint on all sides and urged dialogue "which allows all voices to be heard."

His Grace Bishop Angaelos, General Bishop of The Coptic Orthodox Church in the UK, said, "We pray for and share the pain of those who were injured or have lost loved ones on the streets of Cairo in recent clashes. It is sad to see, after a strong national spirit became visible in Tahrir square almost two years ago, that Egyptians are now being attacked in the streets while living their newly found rights and expressing their opinions and demands. There is no doubt that the issue of the draft constitution is one that is close to the hearts of many, and should thus be dealt with at this initial stage by consensus rather than simple majority, before being presented for referendum. Only then will Egyptians be able to move forward productively and embrace this new era of their contemporary history. We continue to pray for peace, safety, wisdom, restraint and protection for everyone in Egypt."

In a statement, United Action for Egyptian Christians said, "We call on the Egyptian President to cancel his decree of 11/22/2012, immediately postpone the referendum due to take place on the 15th of December and allow the judiciary to carry on with their responsibilities. We believe that unless a consensus is reached for the constitution the political and social turmoil will continue."

Mervyn Thomas, CSW's Chief Executive, said, "We extend our heartfelt condolences to the families of those who died, and the many people injured in the violence in Cairo. We join UAFEC in calling on the Egyptian government to suspend the deeply divisive decree and constitution, and urge the government to uphold the right to peaceful protest and to prevent any further escalation in violence. We also call on the UK government to make urgent representations with the Government of Egypt regarding the need to reconsider both the decree and the draft constitution in the interests of national unity."