

Release Date: 16 May 2011

PUBLIC STATEMENT

International experts and advocates warn of dangerous escalation of attacks on Christians in Egypt and failings of the international media in reporting the incidents accurately.

We, the undersigned group of experts, advocates and faith leaders with an interest in Egypt, religious freedom and human rights, are gravely concerned at the increasing frequency of attacks on Coptic Christians in Egypt, and the manner in which such attacks are being reported by the international media.

We rejoiced at the determined yet dignified manner in which the Egyptian people asserted their right to enjoy fundamental freedoms. We were particularly encouraged by the solidarity and compatriotism demonstrated by all of the country's creeds and political groups throughout demonstrations against the Mubarak regime. It was profoundly moving to see Muslims and Christians take turns in protecting one another while holding prayers in Cairo's Tahrir Square.

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.

We are deeply concerned by the nature of these attacks on Christians, and the clear lack of action on the part of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces. These attacks have been following established patterns. They have either been terrorist attacks, or well organized mob attacks by radical Islamist groups, referred to as Salafists, who are demanding Egypt become an Islamic state, free of Christians. 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.

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.

As we have seen in all cases of mass violence in the 20th Century, radical groups demanding a homogenized society, poor and compliant state performance and widespread scapegoating in media reports are all early indicators of ethnic violence, massacres and genocides.

Unless the international community shows strong resolve and tenacity in keeping the emerging Egyptian leadership accountable, millions of Egyptian citizens will continue to face escalating violence and serious human rights abuses. We urge the Egyptian authorities to uphold rule of law and show resolve in addressing the worrying trends, which have the potential to pull Egypt into further chaos.

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*Disclaimer: This statement reflects the personal views of the signatories and not their affiliated organizations and institutions.

To contact the signatories and request more information on religious freedom in Egypt, please email: EgyptConcern@gmail.com