

Update on the Current Situation in Egypt

ETSC President Atef Gendy's Description of Recent Events in Egypt and Evaluation of the Current Situation

On New Year's Eve, Egypt was hit by a suicide bomb that took the lives of 23 Christians as they were leaving worship in a large Orthodox Churches in Alexandria. For the first time among similar incidents, the majority of citizens responded in grief and anger. Average Muslims were so prompt and genuine in condemning such terrorist attacks against Christians that the government could not treat the matter lightly as it usually does in similar circumstances. That day, I realized that Egypt was not the same any more. People were getting impatient with the lack of transparency and superficial handling of serious problems!

By the 20th of January, 80,000 young Egyptians, probably motivated by the boldness and revolutionary spirit in Tunisia, had already responded positively to an invitation on Facebook and Twitter to gather for a peaceful demonstration at the Liberation Square in Cairo (the largest square in Cairo, which lies in downtown Cairo) on the 25th of January. The government did not take that move seriously, thinking that it was no more than an internet activity that could not result in anything significant. To everyone's surprise, including the government, there were over 250,000 persons demonstrating at the Liberation Square and many thousands in several other major cities and towns across the country. The demonstrators had some legitimate requests such as: (1) A serious solution for the increasing unemployment in Egypt; (2) Increasing the very low salaries that put many Egyptians under the poverty line; (3) the dissolution of the newly-elected Egyptian parliament based on widespread belief that the results were fraudulent; (4) Changing the Egyptian Constitution in a way that guarantees true democracy, especially in the election of the president; (5) Establishing term limitations for the president to ensure that no president will serve more than two terms; (6) Condemning corruption, especially that has resulted from the "marriage" between authority and capitalism (since both the parliament and the government included some very wealthy and, probably corrupt business people).

Until January 28 the regime had nothing to offer to the youth making these demands, As a result, hundreds of thousands of people left the mosques after the Friday Islamic prayers and joined demonstrations across the country. The demonstrators raised the ceiling of their requests; asking for the resignation of the cabinet and the departure of President Mubarak. Unfortunately, violence erupted between the police and demonstrators. The Egyptian TV and radio announced that President Mubarak ordered the army to help the police in restoring the nation's security. However, suddenly, and in a mysterious, scandalous and unprecedented way, the

police withdrew not only from the demonstration points, but also from all their daily positions (including police stations, streets, prisons, and important state buildings). Pictures showed army tanks and vehicles coming into streets. The matter took quite a time during which there was at least 2-3 hours of a vacuum.

This issue resulted in a kind of chaos in the whole country, since thousands of criminals broke out of prisons and started igniting fires, destroying and robbing banks, homes, businesses, shops, cars, in addition to stealing weapons and clothes and ID cards of police personnel. Damage and destruction reached tourist sites, courts, museums, state buildings, etc.

Late that evening, the president gave a speech stating that he would appoint a vice president for the first time in his 30 year reign. He also called the cabinet to step down in order to be replaced under a new prime minister. Although the two appointed men are well respected, people felt unsatisfied and kept demonstrating.

Many opposition parties and political powers, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, exploited the chaos and actively sought to increase it. On Tuesday evening (1 February), Mubarak gave another speech which genuinely and seriously addressed almost all what the demonstrators requested from the first day. He made it clear that he had no intention to run in the upcoming presidential elections but he wanted to use the few remaining months to supervise a safe and democratic transition of power and the constitutional amendments in the articles related to the election of the president. Most people received his speech positively, but many young demonstrators, are still standing till this moment at Liberation Square, requesting only Mubarak's resignation.

On 2 and 3 February there were very violent encounters between thousands of Mubarak's opposition, who want him to leave, and thousands of those who received his last speech positively and felt that he and the newly assigned leaders must take their chance to execute the pledges they made. Since the problem started, Cairo, Alexandria and Suez have been set under curfew for long hours each day.

Where is Egypt going now?

No one knows. We feel like we are in a vicious cycle with a lack of trust between various groups (the current regime, the opposition, the youth who do not strongly support any particular party). In addition, there is a sense that many internal and external powers have hidden agendas and want to exploit the current chaos.

What is the current status of the seminary and the church in Egypt?

The current political crisis does not involve targeting the church or Christians in Egypt. That said, Christians fear that in the absence of stability, the Muslim Brotherhood or any Islamic power might exploit the chaos and seize power.

The crisis also resulted in alterations to our daily lives here in Egypt. As almost every house, institution or building in Cairo, we (the professors of the seminary with our children and workers who live on campus) are taking shifts in guarding the seminary against robbers and attackers until the police return to assume full power and restores security.

Prayer requests:

- Restoring the security in the nation and the lost authority of the state.
- Arresting the criminals who escaped from prisons and are keeping people terrified. Holding previous leaders accountable for the negligence or corruption that caused this security vacuum to happen.
- Setting an end of divisions, destruction and violence so that the people of Egypt can return to their lives.
- Smooth and dignified transition of power.
- Positive spirit of all parties and genuine desire to reach an acceptable resolution to current problems during the negotiations between the government and the leaders of the protests.
- Fresh opportunity for real democracy and development and in Egypt.

Thank you all for your prayer, kind care and concern!

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