

How to Pray for Egypt

by

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Dated February 1st, 2011



The crisis in Egypt is widening with potential impact on world peace and economical stability. Two months ago, after I gave two TV interviews that were broadcasted across the Middle East and North Africa, my observation was “the situation in the Middle East is deteriorating by the hour.” I did not expect, however, that the situation will take such an unprecedented and dangerous turn as we have been watching during the last week.

I would like to share my thoughts on the current crisis in order for us to pray for this volatile situation.

The current situation:

- Egypt, the most populace country in the Middle East, with 80 million people, has been in a state of turmoil due to significant demonstrations asking President Mubarak to step down. Mubarak has been in power for 30 years. His regime is characterized with significant human rights abuses, corruption and police brutality.
- Last Tuesday, January 25, thousands of people took to the streets of Cairo and Alexandria demanding an end to the dictatorship regime. They were faced with police brutality that resulted in hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries. By Friday, January 28 the protesters took over police stations and government buildings in retaliation.
- The police forces were then replaced with the army who took control over the country.
- However, the absence of security forces resulted in a state of chaos and by Saturday it was clear that the social and security order was collapsing. Now there are reports that the

police forces that were dismantled were responsible for or organized the looting of shops and businesses as well as terrorizing ordinary citizens.

- By Saturday night, ordinary citizens organized themselves to protect their families and properties against such violent acts.
- Demonstrations continue despite a countrywide curfew, with the largest demonstration taking place today, Tuesday, February 1st, with over two million participants.
- Food staples and medical supplies start to run low in Egypt.
- All financial sectors including banks and Egypt stock exchange are closed to prevent a total financial collapse.
- Social media: the internet and cell phones were completely shut down (first ever in the history of social media) to prevent communication among demonstrators, however, such a move resulted in shutting down most communication systems in the country which added to the current chaos.
- All domestic transportation systems are shut down.
- Evacuation of American, Canadian and other nationalities started yesterday.

The Direct Economical Impact

- Impact on the financial stability: The Dow Jones lost 166 points last Friday. Most Middle Eastern stock exchanges lost between 5 and 7%
- The more serious impact which was immediately felt as of yesterday is the increase in oil prices worldwide. Today the price of oil is at \$90 a barrel due to the fact that 4.5% of the world oil goes through Egypt, (1.8 million barrels go through Suez Canal a day & 1.1 million barrels go through Summed pipelines from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean a day)
- Suez Canal is a vital artery in world trade with hundreds of commercial ships passing through the Canal on a daily basis connecting Asia to Europe.

The Political Impact

- The situation in Egypt is creating a diplomatic dilemma for US foreign policy. This political dilemma is due to the fact that Egypt is the strongest ally of the US in the Arab World with the largest military power (Egypt is the 10th largest military power in the world).
- Egyptian military is funded by US aids, second only to Israel, with 1.3 billion a year since 1975.
- Mubarak's regime has been supported by US and western powers for its significant role in the peace process, creating stability in the region and friendly relations with Israel.
- The current political dilemma for the US is summarized in keeping a balance between supporting a dictatorship regime that is faithful to US interests in the region or standing

by the Egyptian masses in their demand for democracy, one of the greatest principles of American diplomacy. US, Israel and Europe are watching the situation with great nervousness and anticipation: what will happen to peace treaty with Israel and the stability of the region if this democratic process resulted in an Islamic state in Egypt that is now posses one of the most sophisticate military power in the world?

- Yesterday, the US Military Central Command announced plans to interfere if necessary.
- US Marines were dispatched in Cairo a few hours ago to protect the US embassy

The Church in Egypt

Egypt has the largest Christian presence in the Middle East, with over 12 million Christians. The history of the Egyptian church goes back to the first century of Christianity. Egyptian Christianity gave to the world its first organized theological school (in Alexandria), spirituality (the birthplace of the monastic movement) and was key in defending the Christian faith through the formation of Creeds and Ecumenical Councils. Egyptian Christians kept the lamp of faith burning for 20 centuries in spite of turmoil and persecution. Last Sunday, majority of Christians could not go to Churches to worship probably for the first time in history due to the current crisis in the county.

Please pray:

- Please join Egyptian Christians across the world in a three days of fasting and prayer for Egypt, Monday, January 31 to Wednesday, February 2nd
- For wisdom for the political leaders in Egypt, US, and the EU who are directly involved in the current crisis.
- For a peaceful transition of power and for the future of the country
- For The Middle East as its countries are going through a significant period of unrest (no functioning governments in Iraq or Lebanon, transition of power in Tunisia, potential unrest in Algeria, Jordan, Sudan and Syria)
- For the safety of the people in Egypt as they are going through a very difficult time that is unprecedented in the history of the country
- For Christians and Church leaders on how to navigate such difficult terrain
- Special prayer for Ramez Attalah, the General Secretary of the Bible Society of Egypt and the Chair of the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization's program committee for the 2010 Lausanne Congress that was held in Cape Town three month ago. Ramez had a heart attack last Friday when the largest demonstrations broke in Cairo. He is doing better today but still in the Intensive Care Unite. Ramez is one of my closest friends, whom I knew for over 35 years and one of the finest visionary Christian leaders I have ever known.