



# The Coptic Orthodox Church Centre

## Press and Public Relations Office

### United Kingdom

**Statement by HG Bishop Angaelos, General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom on the Maspero Cairo demonstration of 9 October 2011, and the reaction and response of the Egyptian army, released at a special prayer meeting conducted at the Grapevine Christian Fellowship 12 October, 2011**

The whole world looked upon Egypt at the beginning of this year with excitement as Egyptians appeared to reclaim their nation, looking towards a more promising future of unity and collaborative efforts for their homeland. Only weeks later however, this idealistic dream started to fade and there was a return of attacks on an unprecedented scale against churches and Christians in Egypt.

For the first time we saw churches burned and demolished with the army looking on and doing nothing. Christians lost their lives, while those who had promised to protect 'every Egyptian' looked on. Since then, we have had an escalation of violence from Imbaba to Atfih to Aswan, along with the terrorist bombing of a church in Alexandria earlier this year. The common denominator in all of these, and every other attack for the past decades, is that there has been insufficient official investigation, and an absence of prosecutions and convictions.

This last week however saw a new even more dramatic turn. A peaceful rally, leaving from the Cairo suburb of Shobra and heading to the Maspero state television centre travelled for approximately ten kilometres very peacefully and without incident, bar some stones and rocks being hurled at them at one point. According to reports from the organisers, there were some 60,000 people there: men, women and children, young and old, complete families, marching in an orderly manner.

Once the march entered into the Maspero area however, there was a sudden escalation within moments and the army used excessive lethal force against these peaceful demonstrators. The same army that said in January that it would 'not fire a single shot against an Egyptian citizen' and stood by and watched churches burned and Christians killed 'because it was not in a position to intervene' now used live ammunition and excessive force in this situation, firing lethal shots to the chest and head while armoured troop carriers were driven directly into crowds, mowing people down and killing many.

Even the premature and unsubstantiated accusations by the military that shots were fired from amongst demonstrators would by no means warrant this level of reaction and retaliation used by armed soldiers.

While these facts speak for themselves, the following must be noted and investigated:

1. The escalation of unrest in Egypt has been caused by the numerous, and until now unresolved, attacks on churches and Christians and these must be investigated, and the perpetrators prosecuted and the situation rectified.





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2. Use of this excessive level of force by the military must be investigated by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), bearing in mind that there have been tens of protests and demonstrations by various groups over the past months that have not met this level of reaction to date.
3. The press conference conducted by SCAF has caused outrage with allegations that no shots were fired by the military and that armoured troop carriers were not intentionally driven into demonstrators, asking people to be sympathetic to 'frightened soldiers.' Even if there was no 'intent,' the drivers of those vehicles have indeed caused death, and thus must be prosecuted. Furthermore, none of the footage of that incident shows any demonstrators carrying firearms, swords or molotov cocktails as alleged.
4. The irresponsible reporting by state media on the day of the Maspero incident must be investigated. There were major infringements included: the making premature, inflammatory and unsubstantiated claims that Christians had been firing shots at the military, reporting derogatory and inflammatory claims made against demonstrators, expressing disgust at 'disloyal protestors attacking the army' and publicly televising insults and profanities against Christians and Christianity.

This is indeed a turning point in Egypt's contemporary history. A time in which there can be positive reform and the building of a new Egypt that is cohesive and that instills a sense of citizenship, ownership and responsibility into every Egyptian, ceasing to focus on the person's religion, but more on his or her contribution and accountability to a single nation state. Alternatively, this can be a point at which we merely continue denying the reality of the presence of conflict, leaving unlawful acts unresolved and unprosecuted, presenting one part of the community as a justifiable target, and continuing to drive a wedge between members of a single society, and this will lead to the demise of all.

Persecution is nothing new for Christianity, and especially for Egyptian Christians. Persecution and martyrdom have been an integral part of our identity since the establishment of our Coptic church in the first Century. We have confidence in God, Who is powerful, merciful and victorious; Who maintains His promises and Who seeks to protect His whole creation, if we indeed walk in His way. This is why we do not fear for Christians or Christianity in Egypt. Egypt has been, is, and will continue to be a place in which Christians witness their Faith on a day-to-day basis. We do however fear for Egypt, because it is Egypt that will weaken if Egyptians do not stand together, and if this unhealthy separation and discrimination continues.

Within these days of fast called for by the Coptic Orthodox Church for Egypt, we pray to our God, confident that the solution is in His hands and that His name will be glorified and exalted above all.

Shephalbury Manor, Broadhall Way, Stevenage  
Hertfordshire SG2 8NP, England, United Kingdom  
Tel. : +44-(0)1438-745 232  
Fax : +44-(0)1438-313 879  
Email: Admin@CopticCentre.com  
Website: www.CopticCentre.com

