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AN URGENT MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT OBAMA

Under President Mubarak The Copts, The First Egyptians, Are Treated As Last And Least

20 attacks on Copts took place since Mr. Obama's June 4th speech in Cairo

Mr. Mubarak is on a visit to the USA. At the top of his agenda is promoting peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We wholeheartedly support this noble mission. However, we wish to remind him that charity starts at home: **The Coptic minority in his country badly needs equality, justice and peace.**

The Copts are the indigenous inhabitants of Egypt. Their roots entrench as far back as the country's recorded history. Their number, according to church sources, is approximately 12 millions; about 15% of Egypt's population. However, **discrimination against them is systemic and systematic.** Examples:

- ✧ They are **deliberately excluded and marginalized**. There is *one* Copt among the 444 elected parliamentary representatives. They are kept below a 2% cap in posts of all State organisms (judiciary, military, police, local governance, diplomatic missions, universities, etc). Many posts are off-limit altogether.
- ✧ Freedom of belief is strictly a one-way street, favoring Islam. **A presidential decree is required to build any church** and more than 100 applications to build new churches await President Mubarak's decision. **Coptic children are indoctrinated in Islam** in the Arabic language curricula, obligatory in all schools. State-owned media promote Islam and often disparage Christianity and Judaism as 'falsified' religions. Young Coptic girls, legally under-age, are lured to leave their families, convert to Islam and marry Muslim men. Muslims, who dare embrace Christianity, are denied recognition by the State (for "apostasy from the final and most complete belief") and treated cruelly by the authorities.
- ✧ Under Mr. Mubarak's watch, there have been over 200 documented major attacks on the Copts that resulted in loss of lives, injuries and destruction of churches and property. Complacent authorities often blame the victims and blackmail them to drop their complaints. Attacks have increased in frequency and severity, as perpetrators enjoy impunity and are never punished: In fact, **since President Obama's June 4th groundbreaking speech in Cairo, at least twenty major attacks took place – including burning one church and the closure of four prayer houses.**

The list of grievances is long. The bottom line is that **one fifth of the Copts have fled Egypt** to seek a *normal* life elsewhere. The remainder must be content with a second-class status. **Islam being the official state religion, and Shari'a (Islamic law) the primary source of legislation**, no wonder that citizenship is viewed through a narrow Islamic prism.

The **Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom** of May 2009, states: **"Serious problems of discrimination, intolerance, and other human rights violations** against members of religious minorities (...) remain widespread in Egypt. The **government has not taken sufficient steps to halt the repression of and discrimination** against religious believers, including indigenous Coptic Orthodox Christians, or, in many cases, to punish those responsible for violence or other severe violations of religious freedom." The Commission also recommends that "the U.S. government urge the Egyptian government to remove *de facto* responsibility for religious affairs from the state security services (...)"

The Copts are not seeking special privileges or compensations for centuries of discrimination and persecution. They only **demand** internationally established **human-rights guarantees** to live in their homeland **as full-fledged citizens**.

President Mubarak has, personally, a legal, political and historical responsibility to act upon these flagrant wrongs.

We urge President Obama to raise this important issue with Mr. Mubarak.

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