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*"I will lift up my eyes to the hills-- where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth."  
(Psalm 121:1-2)*

## A Groaning and Divided Egypt

14 December 2012

My dear Brothers and Sisters,

Advent greetings in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

I cannot tell you how much I am heavy-hearted because of what is going on in my beloved country Egypt. Many Egyptians were expecting that after the 25 January Revolution in 2011 there would be no exclusion for any citizen or groups because of their political or religious stance. Sadly, we are still groaning for this equality.

A new committee was formed to write the Constitution, replacing the old constitution that was dissolved by a court judgment. This new committee, which included the churches and other liberal politicians, was accepted with reluctance because it was still dominated by Islamists. The constitutional committee worked for approximately six months however in November 2012 many moderate members and the churches withdrew from it because the draft constitution lacked clarity and the assurance that Egypt would move in a democratic way.

In several Articles in the new Constitution there are some expressions that can be interpreted differently, such as "*the government and the society are responsible to keep the authentic nature of the Egyptian family and its integration and stability while affirming and protecting its morals*" (Article 10). People are afraid that the word "society" will allow certain Islamic groups to restrict the freedom of people. We have already seen some groups such as "*The Authority for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice*" who, in the name of Islam, punish others without resorting to the legal authorities.

Another example would be how Article 2 mentions that “*the principles of the Islamic sharia is the source of all legislation*” while Article 219 defines “*the principle of the Islamic sharia*” in a vague way which can be interpreted in a variety of ways depending on the different Islamic sects.

While people are arguing about these issues, the President announced that the Referendum on the new Constitution should take place on Saturday 15 December 2012. This gave no time for people to read, discuss and suggest amendments in the Constitution before the Referendum. The Egyptian people were promised that there would be a comprehensive process that would ensure the ownership of the Constitution by all people. There is no time for this.



Protestors

In response to this sudden decision, the people are demonstrating in the streets against the new Constitution and the Referendum. Others are demonstrating in support of the President’s decision. The two demonstrating groups became violent and more than 450 people were injured and 8 people were killed. The demonstrations continue now and the fear is that another wave of violence and bloodshed may happen tomorrow.

Those who are against the new Constitution say that all parties should be involved in writing the Constitution and that it should achieve national unity and cohesion within the society. However, it is dividing the society into Islamists and non-Islamists (moderate Muslims and Christians). Those who support the new Constitution do so believing that a new Constitution would bring stability to the country and will pave the way for a new Parliament which will be a proper legislative authority. Many people appealed in vain to the President to postpone the Referendum.

As a result, demonstrations continue in many parts of Egypt. It is worth mentioning that many judges have refused to oversee the voting process in protest of the timing of the Referendum. I wish that the President would postpone the Referendum and begin a process of reconciliation and building trust among the different parties of the society, similar to what South Africa did at the time of Nelson Mandela.



Supporters

It is heart-breaking to see Egyptians against Egyptians. I wonder what is going to happen at the voting polls tomorrow? So, I request your prayers for tomorrow and Saturday 22 December which is the day of voting for other provinces outside Cairo. We don’t want to see Egypt in a civil war.

As a church in Egypt we are praying for our beloved country and its leaders. We also encourage our people to be positive and go to the voting polls to say what they think is right.

I found the words from 2 Chronicles 20:12 to be the words on my lips today “*We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.*”

May the Lord bless you!

+ Mouneer Egypt

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