



رَأْسُ الطَّائِفَةِ الْإِنْجِيلِيَّةِ

THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES OF EGYPT

الدكتور القس أندريه زكي أسطفانوس
رئيس الطائفة الإنجيلية بمصر

Rev. **Andrea Zaki Stephanous, Ph.D.**
President of The Protestant Churches Of Egypt

Rev. Andrea Zaki Stephanous, Ph.D.
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February 17, 2017

Congressman Robert Pittenger
224 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
USA

Dear Sir,

As the President of the Council of Protestant Churches of Egypt, with the membership of nearly 2 million people, I represent most of the Protestants in the Middle East. Following Egypt's largest orthodox community, we are the second largest Christian community in the entire Middle East. I would like to provide you with an Egyptian Christian perspective on the current situation in Egypt and the region. Egypt and the region are facing unprecedented challenges from radical extremists who wish to impose on the people a theological based society, which is intolerant of a diversity views, including those of Christians.

Radical extremists are tearing apart historic nations in the regions such as Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya. Ancient Christian communities in Iraq and Syria have suffered greater hardships than most other nations. These communities could face extinction, after nearly 2000 years of history, if the radical extremists prevail.

Egypt faces the exact same challenge. Egyptians, however, are bound together by more than 5000 years of common history. When the radical extremists tried to divide the Egyptian people by faith, the Egyptian people rose and said, "Religion is for God, the nation is for the people."

ص.ب. ٣٨ الفجالة - القاهرة. ت: ٢٦٤٣٧٢٩٠ - ٢٦٤٣٤٤٤ - ٢٥٩٣٩٢٥٨ (٠٢) ف: ٢٦٣٤٢٤٤٤ - ٢٥٩٠٣٦١٦ (٠٢)

العنوان: ١٤ ش الشهيد أحمد سعيد عامر متفرع من شارع عبد العزيز فهمي - القاهرة - مصر الجديدة - القاهرة

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As radical extremists in Egypt were removed from power, they ferociously attacked Christian churches and institutions in an attempt to divide Egyptians on communal lines. Over a hundred churches and other Christian properties were damaged or destroyed in August 2013. The Egyptian Christian leadership, however, would not let the radicals succeed. The Christian leadership clearly indicated that they would accept the destruction of all of their churches if it were for the benefit of the Egyptian nation.

In response to these attacks on the Christian community, our president Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has taken unprecedented steps to reach out to and reassure the Christians. He has urged Muslim leaders to promote comity with Christian Egyptian neighbors.

President Sisi's policies supporting the Christian community are unlike any Egyptian leader in history. Following the burning of the churches, President Sisi provided federal funding to rebuild and restore the affected churches. To date, 95% of the damaged churches have been restored, and the remaining 5% are in the final stages of restoration. President Sisi also took decisive military action, through air strikes, in Libya in response to the beheading of Egyptian Christians working in Sirte, Libya. The Church Building law is a significant step forward in recognizing the rights of Christians to build and maintain places of worship.

President Sisi has demonstrated public support for Egyptian Christians, traditions, and practices. He was the first Egyptian President to attend Christmas worship service. To the dismay of Islamic fundamentalists, while speaking at St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo this year, President Sisi referred to the cathedral as one of the houses of God.

President Sisi promotes the ideals of pluralistic discourse. At Al-Azhar, the primary Sunni institute in the world, He urged them to take the lead in countering religious intolerance and radical extremism.

The overwhelming majority of Muslim citizens, as well as the Sisi government share the Christian community's commitment to the Egyptian nation. Serious challenges remain; radical extremists attacks, economic choices that previous governments avoided, and the curtailment of some political freedoms. The Egyptian people are prepared to address these challenges and suffer the hardship of the difficult choices, because these decisions are for the long-term benefit of the nation.

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While not approving of each decision of the government, Egyptian Christians understand these painful decisions are necessary if the remnants of radical extremism are to be removed from Egypt. Egyptians, Muslims and Christians, have seen the face of radical extremism and have rejected it. The overwhelming majority of Egyptians will not rest until radical extremism is removed from Egypt and we are at peace again.

Egyptian Christians know that true peace cannot return to Egypt unless peace also return to the region. Egyptian participation in that effort is an indispensable element if the international effort is to succeed. The radical extremists must be defeated militarily, but the real victory will occur when the battle of ideas is won. Only the people of the region can fight and win the battle of ideas. With a larger population of Sunni Muslims than Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, The United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait combined, Egypt is central to the battle of ideas. Western military action, while effective in combatting extremists on the battlefield, often enhances the radical extremists' theological appeal.

Therefore, winning the battle of ideas can only be accomplished with the continued support of Egypt through the special relationship the U.S. and Egypt have developed over the years. Egypt and the United States must continue to enhance their support of each other in order to win the war against radical extremism.

Sincerely,

Rev. **Andrea Zaki Stephanous, Ph.D.**
President, Council of Protestant Churches of Egypt

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