



The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL)

PO Box 14076, Muristan Road • Jerusalem, Israel 91140 • +972-(0)2-626-6800 • administration@elcjh.org

A Statement Denouncing Violence Against Coptic Christians in Egypt

It was with profound shock that we received the news of the devastating New Year attack on Coptic Christians while at worship in Alexandria, Egypt. In my Christmas Eve sermon, I addressed our concern for the growing tensions for Christians throughout the Middle East. The memory of the killing of six Coptic Christians in Nag Hammadi at last year's Christmas Eve Mass is still fresh, and increasing threats and incidents of violence have continued over the last months. This suicide bombing is a clear escalation of violence to which all political and religious leaders must bring an end. We cannot allow the political conflict in the Middle East to become a religious battle, for all of us will be the losers.

We condemn this act of terror, and all violence that aims to create confusion and division. We denounce all extremists who would co-opt religion and misuse it as a dividing force between people who have lived for a long time as one nation.

Here in the Middle East, where the three monotheistic religions affirm the core values of love of God and love of neighbor, it is utterly impossible to carry out such acts of violence with a valid claim that they are done in the name of religion. Such acts are only done in the name of hatred and division.

We affirm Muslim scholars at Cairo's Al-Azhar University in their statement that: "this is a criminal act that can never be justified in any religion."

For this reason, we ask all religious leaders, people of faith, and people of conscience—Christians and Muslims alike—to stand in this moment and, with a unified voice, to clearly denounce such attacks and to expose any hollow claims upon religion.

We join with world leaders in calling on the Egyptian authorities to bring the perpetrators to justice. We call upon all world leaders to support moderation in the Middle East and to actively work for justice and peace in the region.

The global church, must hear the cries of suffering from its Christian sisters and brothers in the Middle East. It must stand together with them by developing a unified strategy for Christians in the Middle East, which supports their continued presence and witness as an alternative to increasing emigration.

We local Christians must remain united in our mission and *diakonia*, continuing to promote moderation, mutual understanding, interfaith dialogue, justice, forgiveness and reconciliation. This is the *martyria* [witness] of the Church in the Middle East. We should not allow extremists to keep the Middle East hostage, for we are, as Christians in the Middle East, an integral part of the fabric of our society.

The Evangelical Family in the Middle East Council of Churches, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, and the Lutheran World stand with the Coptic Orthodox Church, with Pope Shenouda III, and with the Egyptian people in offering our condolences for all who have loved ones who have been injured or killed, including the targeted Christians, Muslim bystanders, and security personnel who were there to offer protection.

We pray that all who are suffering or in danger will find warmth and comfort at the manger side this coming Coptic Orthodox Christmas (January 7th), hearing the words of the angels anew proclaiming: "Fear not!" (Luke 2.10).

*Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan,
President of the Evangelical Family in the Middle East Council of Churches,
Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.*