

APPEAL FOR EGYPT by Fr. Ibrahim Faltas ofm

I am appealing to everyone to be united in prayer for the people of Egypt so that the violence by Egyptians themselves against their fellow countrymen may cease immediately.

Many innocent lives have been lost. This absurd violence leads only to a blind alley. I think of the terrible sorrow of so many mothers who have lost their children, of their suffering and of the dismay in front of all this wickedness.

I think of the poor people, who are experiencing days of chaos and terror, continually fearing that they might be hit and never knowing what might happen next.

Many Coptic churches have been burnt and destroyed. Why is it that churches are being burnt and destroyed? Why are our Franciscan schools being destroyed? Why is every important historic testimony, like the Library in Alexandria, being wiped out?

After the beginning of the Arab Spring, the rage against Christians seemed to abate and, in Tahrir Square, seeds of hope for a new future for Egypt starting appearing. Today, in this same square, these seeds have changed into violence and the persecution of Christians has been intensified.

It is very sad to see this country, which is so fascinating and so full of antique treasures, being destroyed. As from the 25th January 2011, the old Egypt has disappeared and a new era of self-destruction has started. Egypt is a land with a population of about 83 million inhabitants who occupy only 7% of the land.

Poverty in Egypt is very widespread and this war is only helping to make the situation, in which poor families live, even worse.

In many cities, a state of curfew has been imposed. I cannot imagine how the people, a good number of whom live on the streets, can live day after day. The day's cycle never ends. It goes on 24 hours on 24 hours.

During my last visit to Egypt I have heard the stories of so many families who do not see a way out of this situation. They do not see a future for their children and for the new Egyptian generation. I have spoken at length with so many friends whom I met in Alexandria and I could sense their fear and their tension for the

future. Some heads of schools told me that more than three hundred thousand people have emigrated and the number of pupils has gone down drastically. Many entrepreneurs are really desperate. They are compelled to pay high bribes to be able to work as they risk losing everything or to suffer heavy retaliations.

In Egypt, the church was founded in the first century, and during these centuries, among the Coptics, there have been so many scholars and men of culture. These have represented Egypt even overseas and have always maintained a certain balance of dialogue and pacific co-existence. In Egypt, there are about 15 million Coptics, who have opened their country to a westernizing process and to the idea of religious and human freedom. Basically, Egypt owes its modernization to the Coptic Church and without it, the place would have been very gloomy. Once again in Egypt, we are witnessing passively an internal war, where cruelty by man against man prevails, where so many people are killing each other without knowing one another, in the interest of a few people who know each other but do not kill each other.

During the time of the crusades, Saint Francis, as an ambassador of dialogue and peace, undertook a long journey to meet the Sultan of Egypt. By this gesture Saint Francis wanted to give a testimony of respect and dialogue among different cultures. We should remain united in prayer so that the way, indicated centuries ago and in situations, not different from ours, may help and sustain Egypt to rediscover the way of dialogue and peace, based on the respect and the dignity of every man, on equality, on justice and on the safeguarding of religious freedom.

We should pray and work so that peace may be re-established as soon as possible because war only generates the suicide of humanity as it destroys the heart and destroys love.