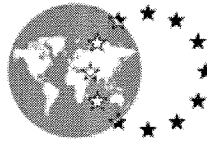


EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE



THE HEAD OF DIVISION

DIRECTORATE North Africa, Middle East, Arabian Peninsula,
Iran and Iraq
DIVISION Middle East I – Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria

Brussels, **26 JUN 2012**
EEAS/BR A(2012)489283 - 662044

Dear Petitioners,

Thank you for your letter of 30 March 2012 on the situation of the Coptic community and its future in a new Egypt governed by Islamist dominated institutions. Please be assured that I took good note of the petition attached to your letter and that I will continue to pay a special attention in supporting freedom of conscience in the country.

The European External Action Service (EEAS) is following very closely all the issues related to freedom of religion and belief through its delegation in Cairo and we are worried by the incidents which have affected the Coptic community recently. Freedom of religion or belief is a universal human right which needs to be protected everywhere and for everyone. The EU has firmly responded to the increasing number of acts of religious intolerance and discrimination across the world. The Foreign Affairs Council conclusions of 21 February 2011 reiterated the EU's serious concern and condemnation over any intolerance, discrimination or violence as epitomised by recent violence and acts of terrorism, in various countries, against Christians and their places of worship, Muslim pilgrims and other religious communities. Moreover, our concerns on the respect of freedom of religion or belief in Egypt were communicated directly to the Head of the Military Council Field Marshall Tantawi, by High Representative Ashton during her visit to Egypt on 14 March 2011 and by President Barroso when he visited the country on 14 July 2011. More recently, the need for the interim authorities to protect the rights of religious communities in Egypt has been stressed in the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council of 27 February 2012.

Equality and non-discrimination are key elements in a democratic society. Everyone is entitled to the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. All religious minorities should have a place in the future of Egypt and in the transition process leading to it. The EU expects that the policies implemented by current and future Egyptian government are in line with the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of religion and belief, as enshrined in the Association Agreement and the Action Plan concluded with Egypt. The new approach of the European Neighbourhood Policy will allow differentiating among partner countries and will be based on mutual accountability, conditionality and the "more for more" principle. In this respect, freedom of religion or belief will be one of the key criteria to assess the progress made by Egypt as regards human rights and democracy to adjust the level of EU aid accordingly.

The rights of persons belonging to religious minorities in Egypt must be fully taken into account during the post-Mubarak transition in order to achieve a truly democratic and pluralistic society.

Yours sincerely,

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Ilkka UUSITALO