

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 17, 2011

Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi  
Commander-in-Chief and Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces  
The Arab Republic of Egypt  
The Ministry of Defense  
23 St. Al-Khaleefa Al-Mamoun, Kobry Al-Qubbeh  
Cairo  
Egypt

Via Facsimile: 011-20-22916227

Dear Field Marshal Tantawi:

We are writing today to express our deep concern over developing attacks against minorities in Egypt, most recently the church burning in Sool, near Cairo. These attacks, particularly at a time when your nation is rebuilding and strengthening its foundation and culture of democracy, raise great concern about the intent of those in power to protect and uphold the rights of all Egyptians to live their lives and peacefully practice their faith and customs. We strongly urge the military to protect all people in Egypt, particularly the Copts and Baha'is, and their property.

As you may know, reports suggest that on March 4, 2011, after religious services ended, a local religious leader directed his followers to attack and kill Christians in the village of Sool. Earlier, there had been rumors of a relationship between a Coptic man and a Muslim woman. In response to these rumors, the religious leader, Sheik Ahmed Abu Al-Dahab, issued the directive for Muslims to attack the Christians and destroy the Church of the Two Martyrs St. George and St. Mina. As a result of the attacks, many Christians fled from the village and are afraid to return to their homes. Further, accounts suggest that the Christian women remaining in the village are being sexually assaulted.

The mobs looted the church, destroyed icons, and burned the church to the ground. Security forces attempted to intervene but failed, or even refused, to restrain the attackers, allegedly even protecting perpetrators and preventing Christians from extinguishing the fire at the church. Reports suggest that the Egyptian Army stated it would rebuild the church on the original site, but it has yet to provide a public, written guarantee. In the meantime, there are accounts that the regional governor is attempting to negotiate with the Christians to allow the Muslims to claim the church land and force the church to be rebuilt elsewhere. The mobs have claimed the land for a mosque and declared that a church would be rebuilt over their dead bodies.

It is to be noted and commended that in the midst of these attacks, however, there were deeply courageous and principled Muslims who helped the priests and others to safety, despite risk to themselves from the attacking mobs. This is the society that the majority of Egyptians desire, one in which Egyptians care for each other and protect each others' lives and fundamental rights.

The hopes for such a society have been consistently undermined by several other recent, egregious incidents beginning with the church bombing in Alexandria and including the brutal murder of a Copt by a security officer on a train departing from Samalout, as well as an attack by the Egyptian Army that resulted in the shooting and wounding of a monk and six church workers at a Coptic Orthodox monastery – the objective of the attack was to destroy a wall built by monastery workers to protect their property from raiders. Furthermore, allegations have surfaced according to McClatchy Newspapers indicating that Egyptian State Security officials were involved in the New Year's Day bombing in Alexandria.

Most recently, violent clashes, in the Mokattam area near Cairo, related to the church burning, reportedly left at least 13 dead and 140 wounded. These recent clashes occurred when a group of a few hundred Christians attempted to join protests near the Cairo headquarters of state television. A group of approximately 15,000 Muslims armed with weapons confronted them. The military intervened but fired live ammunition at the Copts while some from the Muslim mob joined in, firing behind the cover of the military's tanks.

Each of these incidents in and of itself is disturbing, however, as a whole, particularly in light of movements towards establishing a freer, transparent, and democratic society, they are even more troubling as they continue the trend that Christians and their property can be attacked and destroyed with impunity. The Supreme Council and other Egyptian leaders have the responsibility and duty to protect all people in Egypt. While recent historic events in Egypt may have disrupted the operation of the government apparatus, the relative quality of order and stability in society given current conditions indicates that adequate measures to prevent attacks are possible. It is even more disturbing when security forces, instead of protecting all Egyptians, passively stand aside or even participate in attacks against minority populations.

In light of reports that extremist mobs in other communities are observing the response to the church burning in Sool, it is imperative that the government responds swiftly and justly to the incident. If there is hesitancy or the appearance of allowing this type of attack to occur without consequences, it is highly likely that similar attacks will occur throughout Egypt as mobs attempt to exert control over property and terrorize local villagers. As various players and sectors of society currently jockey for power, requiring a church to move its location would send a message throughout Egypt that local extremists simply need to attack a congregation and destroy its church buildings and they can claim control with no repercussions. This is exactly the wrong message to send. It is in this time, when Egypt and its leaders are re-establishing the foundation of the nation, that a strong message must be sent to perpetrators of attacks, including bringing them to justice.

Mr. Field Marshal, we send our support to the Egyptian people in this time of transition, we respectfully request your personal intervention in the case in Sool, and we strongly urge the military to issue and implement as soon as possible a public directive that the church will be rebuilt on its current location and the perpetrators will be brought to justice. It is only with strong action against those seeking to undermine the values of democracy, transparency and freedom in Egypt, that the country will reach its potential and maintain its strength and stability.

Thank you for your attention to this serious matter. We look forward to hearing from you and working with you to support the aspirations of the Egyptian people.

Sincerely,



Joseph R. Pitts  
Member of Congress



Heath Shuler  
Member of Congress



Frank R. Wolf  
Member of Congress



Dan Burton  
Member of Congress



Edward J. Markey  
Member of Congress



Trent Franks  
Member of Congress



Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan  
Member of Congress



Roscoe G. Bartlett  
Member of Congress



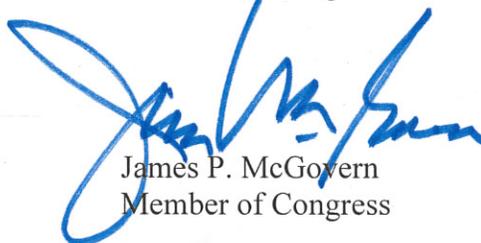
John W. Olver  
Member of Congress



Tom Marino  
Member of Congress



David P. Roe  
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress



Robert B. Aderholt  
Member of Congress



Brian P. Bilbray  
Member of Congress



Aaron Schock  
Member of Congress



Christopher H. Smith  
Member of Congress



Renee L. Ellmers  
Member of Congress



Brad Sherman  
Member of Congress



Rush D. Holt  
Member of Congress



Anna G. Eshoo  
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defense  
The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State