

# Egyptian Christian leaders consider dialogue with Islamic groups

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January 6 (ENInews)--Christian leaders in Egypt are meeting to discuss opening a dialogue with Islamic groups as a way of addressing sectarian violence.

Ahead of the Eastern Christmas celebrated on 7 January, His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, Egypt's Coptic Orthodox Church leader, met on 5 January with Anglican Church leaders, according to news reports, to discuss how they could begin "constructive dialogue" with the Islamists who have won a majority in Parliament.

The meeting came as the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party and the Nour Party secured a clear win in the elections that began on 28 November.

In the recent past, the two groups, seen as fundamentalist, have been associated with threats and attacks on Christians. But the Coptic and Anglican leaders said they had received many positive statements from the groups' members, which affirmed Christians as equal citizens.

According to the Egypt Independent newspaper, the leaders said in the view of the declarations, dialogue between Christians and moderate Muslims would benefit the country. The two denominations also said they would also respect the people's choice in Egypt's first democratic election, according to the newspaper.

With the two Islamic parties securing more than 65 per cent of the votes, Hussein Mohammed, the Brotherhood party leader, said in a news release on 31 December that anyone attempting to cause division must be stopped.

"There are many things in common between Christians and Muslims in history, the nation and the future that must be preserved," he said. "Copts (Christians) in Egypt are fully pledged Egyptians with the same rights as us."

Even with the statement, extremists have sent several threats to Christians in Nag Hammadi, ahead of the Christmas celebrations, according to Barnabas Fund, a UK based charity. This was the scene of a massacre on the same day in 2010, according to the group.

Threats of violence, burning of churches and houses, and murder of Christians by Islamic extremists have increased in Egypt since a year ago, when the "Arab Spring" popular uprising toppled the government of longtime leader Hosni Mubarak.