

# Egyptian Christians fearful of security situation

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June 8, 2011

Jerusalem, June 8 (ENInews)--The security situation in Egypt has "deteriorated considerably" since former president Hosni Mubarak stepped down on 11 February, leaving a security vacuum and Christians feeling "threatened more than ever," according to aid workers.

"Security is still not where it needs to be to give people a greater sense of personal safety. Undoubtedly, there has been an increase in the tensions between Muslims and Christians since Mubarak stepped down ... All Egyptians, not just [Coptic Christians], feel more insecure these days," said Jason Belanger of Catholic Relief. Christians make up about 10 percent of Egypt's 80 million people. Copts are a branch of the Orthodox church.

Since Mubarak's overthrow, violence in Cairo has left 24 dead, more than 200 wounded, and three churches destroyed. Media reports are rife with descriptions of the tense sectarian violence that has increased since the winter. Belanger said the interim government was taking a "hands-off" approach to dealing with the attacks against Christians and was "not doing enough to ensure it immediately responds to these attacks."

Christians seem to feel the interim government's approach is no different than that of Mubarak's government, he said. A New York Times article noted that prior to his overthrow, most Christian and sectarian-related issues were handled directly between Mubarak and Coptic Pope Shenouda III.

"There are initiatives from some Christian and Muslim leaders to work on reducing tensions between both sides, but the number of people engaged in such discussions is very small, and the high percentage of illiteracy in many parts of Egypt leads people to follow their leaders and do what they say,"

Belanger said.

There is also a "significant fear" among Christians about an increase in power of the Muslim Brotherhood, a political group that espouses an Islamic state. Christians fear there will be a push to have Islamic law prevail in Egypt if the Brotherhood receives at least 50 percent of the seats in parliament after elections this September, according to Belanger.

"Several of my Christian colleagues tell me that if Islamic law prevails, they will leave Egypt for other countries," he said. There has been reportedly an increase in the number of people seeking visas at the U.S., Canadian and British embassies.