



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**

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**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in Jordan and
the Holy Land**

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The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. President,

We greet you in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the one who is our comfort and strength.

As church leaders from the United States and the Middle East, we are troubled about the current situation in Egypt and its implications throughout the region. We hear from fellow Christian leaders and our Muslim friends that churches and mosques are being used as political tools throughout the region, especially in the power struggle in Egypt. We are aware that there are some who are trying to transform the political struggles of the region into religious wars.

Egypt is central to our present concerns. We believe that the U.S. has a role to play in order to stop the atrocities in Egypt and to allow the self-determination of that nation to be practiced. What is going on in Egypt is not only a struggle for democracy. This crisis could change Egypt into a battlefield of extremist powers that will not allow the Egyptians to live in dignity. If not quickly resolved, the crisis there will affect the whole region and we will enter again into another vicious cycle of hatred, bloodshed, and war.

Mr. President, you have a role to play in this situation. We remember your speech in Cairo five years ago where you emphasized the right of every nation to determine its own policies. As in Syria, the violence and anarchy afflicting Egypt is creating fertile ground for all kinds of groups to intervene, endangering the possibility for healthy self-determination.

Such a situation will only endanger all moderate forces in Egypt -- be they Coptic or Muslim -- and will only give a boost for non-democratic groups to hold Egypt and the whole Middle East hostage.

In the Middle East, people are being confronted on all sides by religiously-sanctioned political extremism. Let us be clear: no religion has a monopoly on extremism. Political extremism, no matter what religious clothing it wears, is a threat to common citizens and persons of faith.

In relation to Islamic extremism, we urge you to define a clear line of U.S. policy toward the region. The appearance that the U.S. is investing in one group alone has already exacerbated sectarian tensions. Not all Islamists are political extremists. Peace-seeking Egyptians, whether Coptic or Muslim, are committed to the well-being of all of their neighbors and to the promotion of democracy and a vibrant civil society.

We urge you, Mr. President, to play a constructive role in Egypt for the sake of humanity. If you will not play that role now, we are afraid that it will be too late in the coming months. All groups -- the military, the present government, the opposition, and other political parties -- should be called to one table to construct a road map toward reconciliation. This plan should make provision for a constitution that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms, including gender justice and freedom of religion, leading toward presidential and parliamentary elections as soon as possible.

Siding with one group over another, contributes to permanent divisions within the country. We therefore urge you to actively seek peace, using your influence to stop atrocities against all Egyptian citizens as well as attacks against the churches and mosques within which they worship God.

We appeal to you today to take every possible step to stop the violence that is proliferating throughout the Middle East region, but especially in Egypt. The prophet Micah exhorts all leaders, asking "What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."

In God's grace,



Mark S. Hanson
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