

## **Symposium:**

### **Together Against Sectarian Tension**

In recent days Egypt has witnessed a tragic return to violence, with fatal clashes between the Armed Forces and Police, on the one hand, and Christians on the other. This violence has led to a state of mass discontent within the Egyptian society, across both Muslim and Christian populations.

In light of the events in Abdul Moneim Reyad Square and outside the Maspero, Cairo, The Cultural Dialogue Forum of The Coptic Organization for Social Service (CEOSS) organized a symposium, 'Together Against Sectarian Tension', held at the CEOSS Cairo premises on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Guests to the meeting included Islamic and Christian religious leaders, academics, intellectuals, members of the media and youth.

The symposium was opened with a speech, given by Rev. Dr. Andrea Zaki, CEOSS General Director. Rev. Dr. Zaki called for all those present to aid in the re-establishment of national cohesion in the aftermath of violence, stating that this was a vital endeavor for the sake of Egypt at this time of national development.

#### **Contributions – General**

Guests present were able to contribute to the proceedings, suggesting both immediate and soon-to-be-implemented plans for social healing. Central to the ideas presented was the need to spread a culture of acceptance throughout communities, with an emphasis on being tolerant of others. Additionally, it was decided that there is a need to raise awareness of law.

With focus on youth, it was decided that there needs to be created practical solutions to combat animosity between Christian and Muslim youth groups and it was decided that psychiatrists and psychologists be invited to aid in this intervention. Finally, it was decided that both churches and mosques should hold open days/evenings in order to become more accessible to outsiders and, thus, bridge any gaps in society.

#### **Working with the Ministry of Education**

There is to be established a special committee comprised of members of civil society who will be tasked with co-coordinating with the MoE so to address discrimination which may exist in the current curriculum. This committee is to look at religious bias within the curriculum and try to rebalance learning. Additionally, ethics courses are to be suggested and advanced, so to help breed tolerance, dialogue and acceptance within educational institutions and across student populations.

#### **Working with Places of Worship and Developing Religious Discourse**

There is a need to change religious discourse in the public realm, especially of the kind that accuses people of heresy and atheism. Furthermore, religious leaders are called to help pacify members of the public at times such as the recent violence.

Linked to this – and the responsibility of religious leaders to ensure social harmony – The Ministry of Endowments (*Awqaf*) is to supervise *Zawiyas* (small mosques which are unregulated) which are the main source of extremism amongst Muslim populations. Those who continue to fuel sectarian strife must be penalized and prevented from causing further social disharmony.

Finally, there should be a code of ethics for all sheikhs and priests alike.

## **Working on Activating Laws**

There must be a concerted effort to finalize laws, including the law for building places of worship and the law which protects against discrimination.

Those who break the law should be punished accordingly, and thus we must work to apply the law to protect citizen's rights against wrongdoers. This must lead to a greater appreciation of the right to justice for all citizens, including the right to pursue their faith in a non-violent manner.

## **Working with Civil Society**

A committee comprised of members of civil society organizations will be formed, and they will be tasked with monitoring all media and legal developments within Egypt relating to the third sector.

Discrimination must not be permitted and so another committee will be formed to monitor discrimination of all types.

A media code of ethics must be established.

## **Working with Heritage and the Ministry of Culture**

Both Muslim and Christian heritage must be reviewed so to discourage the reproduction of sectarian discrimination across faiths.

Finally, we must all work to monitor all forms of discrimination on the basis of religion in Egypt today. This monitoring must look towards state institutions, as well as into communities and religious establishments, so to ensure social harmony and the cultivation of a discrimination-free society.