

## EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE



THE HEAD OF DIVISION

DIRECTORATE North Africa, Middle East, Arabian Peninsula,  
Iran and Iraq  
DIVISION Middle East I – Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria

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EEAS/BR/lj

Mr Ibrahim Habib  
Email: [ibrahimHab@aol.com](mailto:ibrahimHab@aol.com)

Dear Mr Habib,

High Representative/Vice-President Ashton has asked me to reply to your e-mail of 5 December 2011 regarding the situation of Christians in Egypt.

The European External Action Service is deeply worried by the violent incidents which have affected the Coptic community. In this regard, the clashes which occurred in front of the Maspero State TV building on 9 October constitute an unacceptable blow on the Egyptian people's strive for democracy and go completely against the original spirit of the Tahrir square movement that fought for the human rights of all Egyptians, notwithstanding ethnic and religious belonging. On 10 October, High Representative/Vice-President Ashton issued a statement condemning the violent crack down of the Army against peaceful demonstrators, expressing her sympathy for the victims and their families, calling upon the authorities to protect the right to demonstrate peacefully and asking for an investigation to bring those responsible to justice. The EU will keep the pressure on the Egyptian administration to ensure that the investigation on the Maspero events will be carried out appropriately and will lead to the identification and condemnation of the culprits.

Freedom of religion or belief is a universal human right which needs to be protected everywhere and for everyone. The EU has firmly responded to the increasing number of acts of religious intolerance and discrimination across the world. The February Foreign Affairs Council conclusions reiterated the EU's serious concern and condemnation over any intolerance, discrimination or violence as epitomised by recent violence and acts of terrorism, in various countries, against Christians and their places of worship, Muslim pilgrims and other religious communities. Moreover, our concerns on the respect of Freedom of religion or belief in Egypt were communicated directly to the Head of the Military Council Tantawi, by High Representative Ashton during her visit to Egypt on 14 March and by President Barroso when he visited the country on 14 July.

Equality and non-discrimination are key elements in a democratic society. Everyone is entitled to the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. All religious minorities should have a fair place in the future of Egypt and in the transition process leading to it. The EU expects that the policies implemented by current and forthcoming Egyptian government are in line with the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of religion and belief, as enshrined in the Association Agreement and the Action Plan concluded with Egypt. The new approach of the European Neighbourhood policy will allow to differentiate among partner countries and will be based on mutual accountability, conditionality and the "more for more" principle. In this respect, freedom of religion or belief will be one of the key criteria to assess the progress made by Egypt as regards human rights and democracy to adjust the level of EU aid accordingly.

Let me assure you that we will closely follow the situation of the religious minorities in Egypt. With the Egyptian authorities, we will continue to stress the paramount importance the EU gives to freedom of religion or belief. The rights of persons belonging to religious minorities in Egypt must be fully taken into account during the post-Mubarak transition in order to achieve a truly democratic and pluralistic society.

Yours sincerely

P.O.   
Ilkka UUSITALO