

Coptic Orthodox Rally, January 14, 2010

I bring you greetings from the Victorian Council of Churches, of which the Coptic Orthodox Church is a valued member. We join our prayers with yours today.

We gather to express our deepest sorrow and to seek the solace of God for our Coptic brothers and sisters. Further, we have come to find a way to express our anger in a way which does not harm, but seeks to heal.

We all know that the Coptic Church and its people have faced centuries of pain and persecution. The events of Christmas Eve have brought home the extent of the tension which exists in Egypt. Some of us would be very much aware of that, and others are only learning about it for the first time.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights holds that the right to life and the right to religious freedom cannot be reduced to make way for any other consideration. How then can we *not* stand alongside these our brothers and sisters as they are *again* forced to bear the burden of grief and sorrow?

There can be no greater trampling of a person's human rights than that they be killed. That these deaths occurred outside a church service compounds the horror. It is beyond doubt that this attack was deliberate and targeted. In Australia, it is hard to comprehend that such an attack could take place. But we know that human rights, while set out in a *Universal Charter*, are not universally upheld or even recognized.

Greater than the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for us as Christians though, is the Gospel imperative to love our neighbours. Those of us from Christian traditions outside the Orthodox are bound to be here. Our love compels us to hold those around us in their time of need.

Words come hard at a time like this, and we can only pray that our being with those in grief will suffice. With the Psalmist, we cry “*Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer.*”

What then shall we do? As a Council of Churches, we will join with our brothers and sisters in calling on the Australian Government to take whatever action it can to make our horror at these events known. We will join them in making representations to the Egyptian Government if they wish.

We will keep them in our prayers.

We will seek the Lord with them, and pray as the Psalmist does: “*May the LORD answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you.*”

Amen.