

Statement by Ambassador Ehab Fawzy
Permanent Representative of Egypt
On the aftermath of the terrorist attack
against the Church of the Two Saints in Alexandria
OSCE Permanent Council, 13 January 2011

1. On the morning of January 1st, 2011, Egypt awoke to the shocking news of a terrorist attack that took place in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria. This senseless act took innocent lives, and changed others forever.
2. Taking as its target members of Egypt's Coptic community that were celebrating the coming of the New Year at the Church of the Two Saints, the attack left a whole nation in shock.
3. Addressing the Egyptian people shortly after the attack, President Hosni Mubarak condemned what he referred to as a heinous and atrocious act, and an attempt to drive a wedge between Egypt's Christians and Moslems. The President further assured the people of Egypt that the plotters and perpetrators of this terrorist act would be tracked down.
4. Egypt appreciates the many expressions of solidarity with the Egyptian people and Government that have been forthcoming since the tragic events of January 1st, including those heard here today. Such expressions reflect an understanding of the true intentions that motivate terrorists and lie behind the acts of violence they perpetrate.
5. Acts of terrorism are self defeating insofar as they lead us to redouble our collective efforts to combat this scourge. But these efforts must also include a constant vigilance on everyone's part in order to ensure that increasingly vocal and influential political movements that exist in the world we live in and flourish on the politics of hate and scaremongering, are not permitted to become mainstream.

6. We should not forget that the spilling of innocent blood is an intolerable act, regardless of the victim's race or religion. In this connection, we must question why it is that international reactions to acts of terrorism are more often than not dictated by the victim's race or religion rather than by the fact that they are first and foremost human beings? We must pay heed in order to ensure that schools of thought that see the world from the perspective of "us" against "them" are not be allowed to spread or to sway responsible governments.
7. Those who have monitored reactions to the Alexandria bombing will have noted that, in a bid to agitate rather than calm spirits, irresponsible individuals and media outlets have tried to portray Egypt as a country in which Christians are systematically persecuted and live in fear. This is untrue.
8. It is easy for some to criticize and make allegations that rest on little more than ill-informed and pre-conceived stereotypes. But the truth of the matter is that without its Christian community, Egypt would not be Egypt. Need I remind you that Egypt is an old country whose roots reach deep into history? Need I point out that Christian monasticism was born in the Egyptian desert and that the first Christian churches in history were built in Egypt? How many are aware that Egypt's Coptic Church was founded by St. Mark in the very early years of the 1st Century, making it one of the oldest Christian Churches in the world?
9. I know that some will hear this and think to themselves that I am talking about ancient history and ignoring the present reality. So let me address the present:
 - o How many of those who speak of obstacles being put in place to prevent the practice of the Christian faith in Egypt are aware of the fact that the dozens of Egyptian monasteries, many of which were on the verge of closing their gates definitively due to a severe shortage of monks, have, in recent years, witnessed a strong revival resulting from a renewed enthusiasm among Egypt's Christians for monastic life?
 - o And how many of those who claim that Egypt's Christians live in fear know the number of active Churches in Egypt today? Are they 100 churches? Or 200? No, Mr. Chairman, there are close to three thousand Churches in Egypt today in which Christians freely practice their religion. There are also 20 Synagogues in Cairo and Alexandria that are open for Jewish worship.

10. The first stirrings of faith in Egypt reach back thousands of years. Pre-dynastic Egypt witnessed the formulation of religious beliefs that would influence life in Egypt for millennia to come. Ruling more than 3300 years ago, Pharaoh Akhenaton is credited with being the first of the monotheists. Moses was born in Egypt where he received the Ten Commandments, and Jesus escaped to Egypt with the Virgin Mary seeking refuge from persecution. In the Quran, Egypt is the only country mentioned by name, and Joseph tells his parents “Enter Egypt, God willing, safe and secure”.
11. Had we Egyptians, over the many years of our history, not developed a formula whereby all of the parts that make up the indivisible whole are able to co-exist peacefully and harmoniously, Egypt would long ago have ceased to be Egypt. There is no denying that, like any other society in the world, Egyptian society has problems to resolve and challenges to confront. It is the responsibility of the Egyptian government and of the Egyptian people to deal with those problems and challenges, and I know that they will.
12. I wish to conclude by stating that while Egypt has, in the past, had to grapple with home-grown terrorist networks, on the morning of January 1st, the average Egyptian, without awaiting the results of an investigation, quickly came to the conclusion that the bombing of the Church of the Two Saints could not have been home-grown terrorism. Indeed, throughout Egypt’s long history, and the many centuries of peaceful and harmonious co-existence that Egyptians proudly point to, the integrity and safety of religious establishments, be they temples, synagogues, churches, monasteries or mosques, has been a sacred principle upheld and defended by all. It is because the bombing of the Church of the Two Saints violated this sacred and age-old principle that the people of Egypt have been so deeply affected by it. This tragic event has led to a renewed determination and commitment by all Egyptians, on both the popular and official fronts, to strengthen the deeply rooted foundations of peaceful and harmonious co-existence that Egypt’s national unity depends and rests upon.

Thank you.