

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 21, 2013

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary
Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

The deteriorating situation of Egypt's Christian minority is a matter of great concern. Documented, large-scale attacks against Christians in Maspero in October 2011, Imbaba in May 2011, and Alexandria in January 2011, resulted in dozens of deaths and hundreds of injuries. Recent reports of more frequent, targeted attacks against Coptic churches and individuals in Egypt are deeply troubling. In the recent violent unrest and military crackdown, 38 churches, 58 Coptic-owned houses, and 85 businesses were destroyed over the course of just four days.

Egypt's Christian minority and their ability to worship are in danger. The situation warrants a clear U.S. response. We are especially troubled by reports that Egyptian authorities have failed to respond to attacks on Christians and churches, or hold perpetrators accountable. Reports from international human rights groups describe an 18-hour attack on Christians in the Nagah Hassan district of Dab'iya, during which security forces, including police from Qurna and Luxor, and Central Security Forces riot police, were present at the scene but failed to take any action to stop the violence and prevent casualties. The local security officer in charge reportedly told an international investigator that "it's not [the police's] job to stop killings. We just investigate afterward."

We know that you have recently decided to recalibrate U.S. assistance to Egypt in light of the government's violent and heavy-handed response to ongoing protests. As you continue to review U.S. policy towards Egypt and consider how to advance U.S. interests in this country, we ask that you speak out clearly and publicly against the cycle of violence in Egypt. Specifically, we urge you to highlight the responsibility of interim Egyptian government to protect Coptic Christians and other minorities. We request you indicate the specific steps the State Department is taking to reinforce this issue with the Egyptian government, as well as the specific steps the Egyptian government is taking to protect Coptic churches, communities, and individuals. Finally, we ask that you move quickly to nominate someone with exceptional qualifications in the field of human rights and religious freedoms to be the next ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom.

It is our view that Egypt is part of a broader trend: religious freedoms throughout the Middle East and South Central Asia, particularly for Christians, are under assault. The U.S. must respond to this challenge and continue to be a forceful defender of religious freedom throughout the world. We recognize this is not an easy task. We offer our support and stand prepared to work with you as you find ways to use U.S. influence to stop sectarian violence and end the persecution of Coptic Christians in Egypt.

Sincerely,



Bob Corker



Lamar Alexander



Roy Blunt