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Guest Editorial

Mubarak Needs Less Talk and More Action

Dr. Ashraf Ramelah

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(AINA) -- We know that Mubarak is preparing to visit the United States in April to meet with its new President Obama. This visit is very important to the ageing Mubarak, who is desperate to keep up his image as self-acclaimed regional stabilizer, leader of the Arab world and main player in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. A role which also secures him nearly 2 billion dollars of in US aid plus handouts yearly.

Lately, dents were put in his image and questions were raised during Israel's air strikes on Gaza, about his capacity to deal effectively with regional crises. Hence his frantic efforts to broker a ceasefire deal to keep credibility in his self-declared role.

Presently Mubarak is plighted with a heap of problems at home, economically and domestically; unemployment, poverty, demonstrations, strikes, Islamic extremism and sectarian strife, to say the least.

The President and his government have pulled out all the stops in their efforts to limit damages as quickly as possible, polish his tarnished image, hoping to make this visit a success. A public relations snag during the visit cannot be afforded.

Any sensitive issues touching on human rights such as cases of reverts to Christianity, Muslim-born converts, Baha'i rights, or Christian mothers' rights in custody cases, which are in front of the courts, have all been deferred to later dates.

Paving the way for this visit has started some time ago, making use of members of Mubarak's regime, such as this week's visit by Foreign Minister Abul Gheit to the US, and officials with a lesser rank.

In keeping with a good image, Mubarak wants to avoid the Copts in North America causing him any embarrassment in front of the new American President, as they have done previously with his predecessor Sadat.

Last month he sent foreign office officials to pacify the angry Copts in North America, lest they show their feelings during his visit. Their voices have been getting much louder regarding the escalation of persecution against their fellow Copts in Egypt, without any reaction from the government to put an end to it.

The meetings were unsuccessful as the Copts could no longer be hoodwinked with promises they knew well from past experiences will be broken again once the Presidential visit is over. The officials cut short their visit and went back home empty-handed.

Does Mubarak not know that the Coptic issue is no longer a secret to the international community, and that consecutive American administration and human rights organizations have expressed discontent in this respect time and time again?

President Mubarak usually makes use of his speeches to relay certain messages to western leaders before important events, like this forthcoming visit.

In the beginning of this month of February, in his speech for the celebrations marking the Police Day, Mubarak declared the day of 25th January as a national public holiday, in recognition of the police sacrifices to achieve security and stability in the homeland. This outraged most Egyptians, with some considering it a bad joke, as police abuses are no secret.

Information collected by Voice of the Copts as well as other human rights organizations, show that the Egyptian police is corrupt through and through; incidents of abuse, sexual harassment, sodomy, framing, bribery, money extortion, arbitrary arrests, and torture is common, not only directed at criminals, but at simple, helpless people including children, who know nothing about their rights.

Police in Egypt has become an institution in itself, above the law, and is far away from serving the citizens, they became rather a tool to silence and intimidate them. In spite of their bad reputation, Mr. Mubarak regards them as his human 'guardian angels'.

Instead of all this appeasement, I wonder if it would not have been better to correct and clean the Egyptian law enforcement system, in an attempt to bring some order and safety to the citizen.

Maybe the President was attempting to show the world that his Police Force is a very effective tool in counterterrorism, and deserves being honored?

During his Police Day speech, Mubarak admitted the damage caused to the country and its people due to sixty years of wars, in support of the Palestinian cause, saying: "Had it not been to the successive wars for Palestine since 1948, our country and our people would have done much better today".

The reasons behind Mubarak's sudden statement mystified me. Why Was Mubarak justifying his policies for the first time ever? Did President Mubarak, after twenty-seven years of being an absolute ruler over the people of Egypt, just realize the great damage caused

to the country by wrong policies adopted by him and his two predecessors? Was this just some propaganda prior to his visit to President Obama? Was it an apology to the Egyptians for living in poverty for over 60 years while their leaders sacrificed them by going into war for their Arab Muslim brothers? Or were these words intended to pave the way for requesting more aid to help the poor Egyptians? Egyptians who have to queue for days to get a subsidized loaf of bread?

Well Mr. Mubarak, what happened to the billions of dollars received from the United States and Western Europe as aid? Where did this money go?

It is not an internal matter as is always claimed by your government, Mr. Mubarak. As taxpayers, we all have the right to know where our money went. As citizens of western countries we plan from now to emphasis to our governments the need to question you and your government concerning the use of the financial aid and handouts, money which we have contributed to, and have the right to make sure it went to the purposes it was intended for.

What happened to your pro-democracy rhetoric Mr. President, which you failed to back up with action? What will you show for as progress in democracy, when you will be asked about it during your visit no doubt?

Mr. Mubarak, we are tired of listening to your pledges to uphold political and economic reforms; pledges that never materialized during all those years. The time has come for you to seriously make it up to those who have accepted you as their President for more than quarter of a century; people whom you have neglected for decades.

We need a 180 degree change in policy; all Egyptians should be equal under the law. The rule of law has to be reinstated and respected. Democracy, freedom of speech, thought, and religion has to be granted to eighty million Egyptians. Corrupt people have to be punished and innocent people must be freed.

Are all these embarrassing problems a tall order to fix before your visit, Mr. President?

Ashraf Ramelah is the founder and President of [Voice of the Copts](#), a human rights organization with offices in Italy and the United States. He is dedicated to the Coptic Cause, and believes that his life's mission is to speak up for the oppressed Copts. He writes mostly in the Italian newspapers, appears frequently in the Italian and Arab Media. Dr. Ramelah, himself a Copt, was born in Cairo, Egypt. At the age of 17 years he traveled to Italy to study Architecture. Voice of the Copts is dedicated to bringing to the world fair, correct and balanced information regarding Copts and Christians in countries with Arab Muslim majorities.

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