



## Coptic Americans to Hold Rally in Washington on Mubarak's Visit

Posted GMT 8-13-2009 20:38:58

(AINA) -- Egypt's President Mubarak is poised to travel to Washington in mid August on an official visit, which had been previously scheduled for May 25, but had been delayed because of the death of his grandson.

Coptic organizations in the U.S. and Canada have prepared for a peaceful mass demonstration in front of the White House, to be held on August 18 during the meeting between Mubarak and President Barack Obama.

These organizations view Mubarak's visit to the U.S. as an opportunity to voice their grievances over the escalating violations and discrimination against the Copts in Egypt, and to demand justice and the rule of law.

"During Mubarak rule of 28 years, there have been more than 1500 violent attacks against the Egyptian Christians (Copts) which resulted in loss of lives, injuries and destruction of churches and property," according to the Press release of a group of more than ten Coptic organisations in the U.S. and Canada. "Lately, such attacks increased significantly in frequency and severity and the attacking criminals are encouraged by the total impunity as the government does not prosecute them." says the release.

Other Coptic Organizations also rallying in front of the White House are demanding among others an immediate stop to attacks on Coptic churches and monasteries, Muslims killing Copts without being convicted and the systematic abduction, rape and forced Islamization of Coptic teenage girls

Dr. Naguib Gabraeel, a Copt himself and President of the local Egyptian Union Organization for human rights (EUHRO), said the Coptic Rally in front of the White House is a golden opportunity to express the anger felt by the Copts against the violation of their legitimate rights in Egypt after all efforts to obtain justice have failed.

At the same time, he called on Coptic activists in Egypt to arrange for a peaceful demonstration at home in the presence of mass media before President Mubarak's visit to the United States in order to make sure that the world knows that the Copts at home compliment Copts in the Diaspora and all are united on one legitimate issue. This call came as a defense of the Copts in the West who have been accused by pro-government media, and even some Muslim intellectuals, of "treason" and of "following an American and Zionist agenda."

Ever since the date of President's Mubarak's August visit became known, five years since his previous visit, the Egyptian government has been trying to placate the American Copts to diffuse their anger over the increased sectarian violence against the Copts in Egypt, in the hope of precluding them from embarrassing President Mubarak, or even completely undermining his visit to Washington.

To appease the Copts, President Mubarak said in an NDP Party speech on August 3rd in the town of Damietta "I am the president of all Egyptians of different religions, there is no difference between Muslim and Christian citizens because we are all Egyptians living on the soil of Egypt," pointing out that the distinction on the basis of religion was created by the old "Western colonialism" to cause divisions among the sons of one homeland.

In preparations for Mubarak's visit to Washington, a few co-opted parliamentarians, headed by Dr. Mostafa El Fiky, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Egyptian parliament, asked for dialog with the Coptic community. The meeting, which took place on 22 July 2009 at the Grand Hall of St. Mark Coptic Church in Fairfax, Virginia, went badly. Dr. El Fiky insisted that "Copts are living their second golden age under Mubarak" and that there is no Coptic persecution. When Ms. Dina Guirguis, executive director of Voices for a Democratic Egypt, tried to dispute his statement, he accused her of treason and said "I know who has sent you." His outburst, which was recorded on tape, was criticized by many.

The Free Copts organization came out on its website exposing the tricks of the Egyptian Embassy in Washington, which knew of the intended Presidential visit before anyone else. The Embassy, through its affiliated organizations, managed to book all the spaces around the White House for the 17th and 18th of August to prevent Copts from demonstrating.

"They produced inflated numbers of participants, such as 'Egyptian American Pharmacists', which has a booking for 1400 people. Are there 1400 Egyptian-American Pharmacists who are coming to cheer for Mubarak?" said Magdi Khalil, a Coptic activist and director of the

## Assyrian International News Agency

Middle East Forum. "They booked for 3550 people who would come to cheer for Mubarak, which is an absolute joke! We know for a fact that the Egyptian Embassy staff is going round the mosques in New Jersey, where there are many new immigrants, offering people to join the pro-Mubarak demonstration for a fee of \$50-100, in addition to a free sight-seeing day in Washington."

"The Copts have taken immediate legal action against this abuse of democracy," said Khalil "We have now received permission and have been assigned a rallying place in LaFayette Park in front of the White House."

A number of people from Darfur in Washington will also hold a demonstration in front of the White House on the day of Mubarak's meeting, protesting against the "Egyptian saboteur role in Darfur." Families of Sudanese refugees killed in Cairo by Egyptian security are expected to participate, as well as Nubians. Egyptian Muslim-born converts to Christianity who have fled to USA seeking asylum will also rally on that day.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) sent a [letter](#) to Obama on 8/10/2009, the second in two months, expressing concern over an upsurge of violent attacks in recent months by militant groups on Coptic Orthodox Christians, where perpetrators of the violence are not prosecuted by the government. USCIRF urged President Obama to raise concerns about religious freedom and related human rights during his upcoming meeting with the Egyptian President. It recommended that the Egyptian government should implement procedures that would ensure that all places of worship are subject to the same transparent, non-discriminatory, and efficient regulations regarding construction and maintenance, as well as removing the religion "portfolio" from the state security services and placing responsibility for religious affairs in a more transparent and politically accountable section of the government.

A Copt from Maryland said "When Mubarak meets with President Obama, no doubt he will be talking about the suffering of the Palestinians at the hands of the Israelis. Just imagine that if President Obama looks out the window, he will find hundreds if not thousands of American Copts standing there imploring the help of the free world to stop the suffering of their Coptic brethren in Egypt at the hands of Mubarak and his regime. How will Mubarak feel then?"

By Mary Abdelmassih

© 2011, Assyrian International News Agency. All Rights Reserved. [Terms of Use.](#)