



Statement

From October 17-19, 2017, we, the Coptic Orthodox bishops of North America, gathered for our semi-annual conference in Titusville, Florida and discussed the acts of sectarian violence directed against our beloved brethren in Egypt. The most recent of these events resulted in the martyrdom of Hegumen Samaan Shehata from the Diocese of Beba and El Fashen.

We joyfully commend the righteous soul of this father, the martyr Hegumen Samaan Shehata, to the Paradise of Joy, confident that the Lord will accept his soul with those whom St. John the Beloved witnessed beneath the altar: "When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed" (Rev. 6:9-11). We pray that the Lord bestow His heavenly comfort upon Fr. Samaan's virtuous wife, his children, his friends, and the beloved congregation of Christ, through the prayers of our father, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, his partner in the apostolic liturgy, His Grace Bishop Stefanous, and all our honorable fathers, the metropolitans and bishops.

We take this opportunity to affirm the following:

First, the martyrdom of Hegumen Samaan Shehata is not an isolated event, but is one incident in a chain of recurrent events that has resulted in the loss of lives of countless martyrs and the injury of many confessors, both clergy and laity. The following are examples, just to name a few: the events of El Arish, Libya, St. Peter's Cathedral in Cairo, St. Mark's Cathedral in Alexandria, St. George's Cathedral in Tanta, St. Samuel's Monastery, and many others. These are all a result of the evil of organized terrorism targeting Christians, entrenched in an ideology of religious extremism and proliferated by a *fatwah* (religious opinion) emanating from a spirit of hate. Such a *fatwah* promotes fanaticism, violence, and discrimination against others.

Second, we recognize the admirable efforts of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and many honorable Muslims who reject the injustice and persecution that their Coptic brethren continue to face, and deny the use of their religion as justification for these wicked and unpardonable acts.

Third, we call upon all the authorities in our beloved Egypt to deal with these criminal acts with all swiftness, severity and justice, in order to serve as an example to others, without bias or compromise. We ask that the law be applied to all without preferential treatment based on religious faith, and in such a way that brings a decisive end to the brutal voices that encourage violence against Christians. These voices are embodied in those that call for a less stringent punishment on the Muslim murderer if the victim is Christian, under the premise that Christian blood is less valuable!

Fourth, we are deeply concerned about the reputation of our beloved Egypt, and perceive any blemish on her reputation as a direct consequence of whitewashing, dismissing or belittling these crimes, and the lack of media coverage. We are dismayed that Egypt, which served as a refuge and harbor for the



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Holy Family, became the site of the murder of an innocent, unarmed priest in broad daylight—a heinous crime which took place without any reaction from bystanders or intervention of witnesses, and with inexcusable delay in the arrival of emergency services! All these shameful shortcomings are widely shared in social media.

Fifth, terrorism is a worldwide problem that necessitates worldwide collaboration, as stated by President el-Sisi. Thus, we, the children of the Coptic Orthodox Church in North America, are compelled to increase our efforts throughout the Western world in raising awareness about the dangers of organized terrorism targeting Christians. We call for solidarity in aiding our motherland and President el-Sisi in confronting it unrelentingly.

Sixth, we call upon all of our churches to dedicate Sunday, October 22, 2017 to pray for all of our martyrs, confessors, their families, and for the peace of the Church and the entire world.

May the Lord grant the whole world His peace and repose the souls of the martyrs, comfort their families and their beloved, heal all the wounded and injured, and support all the confessors to endure these pains and sufferings and glory be to His majesty forever.

H.E. Metropolitan Serapion

H.G. Bishop Youssef

H.G. Bishop David

H.G. Bishop Michael

H.G. Bishop Mina

H.G. Bishop Karas

H.G. Bishop Peter

H.G. Bishop Abraham

H.G. Bishop Kyrillos

Rev. Fr. Saraphim El Souriany