

**Report to BGM of Second Dialogue between Egypt and the United States  
March 29-April 2, 2016  
By A. Roy Medley**

From March 29-April 2, 2016, I participated in the second dialogue between Egyptians and Americans sponsored by the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services in Egypt and Hands Along the Nile in the United States. The first such conference was held three years ago in Washington DC. This second conference was held in Cairo. Each dialogue has consisted of representatives from the religious, political, business and human services arenas. Because of American Baptists' role in outreach to the Muslim community through dialogue, I have been invited to participate in each session.

Hands Along the Nile is a church-based development group that works in several countries in economic development projects among the poor. In Egypt, their partner is the Coptic (meaning Egyptian, not the church) Evangelical (primarily Presbyterian) Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) which is headed by the Rev. Dr. Andrea Zaki, an ordained Presbyterian minister.

This year's dialogue group from the United States consisted of two congressional staff persons, one the legislative aide to Sen. Tom Cotton of Arkansas and the other the legislative aide to Rep. Joe Pitts of PA, two representatives from the UCC, Rev Aundreia Alexander of the NCC, myself and the director of HANDS.

Our first day in Cairo featured a large panel of Egyptians including scholars, religious leaders, leaders in civil society organizations and business, and politicians. Formal papers were presented by several participants on various aspects of Egyptian life under president Sisi in the context of the political situation in the Middle East. Aundreia and I each presented a paper on the role of faith-based development and advocacy for the poor in the United States.

The core issue of the dialogue for many of the Egyptians and for us from the United States was the state of human rights in Egypt under President Sisi. The Egyptian participants stressed several points: 1) the Muslim Brotherhood was a dangerous threat to democracy and the coexistence of Muslims, Christians and other faiths in Egypt. 2) Sisi and their current parliament were elected in a democratic process which should be honored. 3) In the current Middle East situation the alliance between Egypt and America must remain strong. On the American side there was great concern about the reports of increased oppression of critics of the Sisi government and the arrests of dissenters. The dialogue at times was quite tense as the issue of human rights in Egypt was pressed by the Americans and the Egyptians responded from their perspective. More than once, the Egyptians pointed to what they saw as a double-standard in US policy especially regarding the use of torture by the US during the Iraq war and its publicly stated concerns about human rights in Egypt. In the end the conversation was clarifying for each side. The Egyptians came to a greater understanding of the multiplicity of voices in US politics, and the role of churches protesting torture and other abuses of human rights in the US. Likewise, we as Americans learned more about the threat the Muslim Brotherhood, ISIS and other Islamist groups pose to the historic role of a secular government in Egypt, the co-existence of Muslims and Christians in Egypt, and the high respect in which the military is held in Egypt as the guardian of the Constitution.

On the second day and third days, we visited economic development projects sponsored by CEOSS and HANDS. There is a great variety of efforts, including micro-loans, job-search and employment assistance, the support of co-operatives, and agricultural efforts. The scope of the

**FYI: Report from GS Emeritus Roy Medley**

efforts and their successes were quite impressive. We also visited a dialogue group consisting of Christians and Muslims that has been quite active in a suburb of Cairo. About 100 people gathered to welcome us and to speak of the importance of the dialogue group in creating bonds of love and peace between Christians and Muslims in their community. The testimonies were quite moving, including those of the founders, one a Presbyterian pastor and the other a Muslim cleric, who had grown up together as friends and had instituted the dialogue as a counter witness to the growing tension between Muslims and Christians under the Muslim Brotherhood.

Our delegation also met the two chief Islamic clerics residing in Cairo. The first is the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Sheik Shawki, who is the leading Muslim religious authority of Egyptian Sunnis. The second is the Grand Imam of Al Azhar University, Dr. El Tayyeb, who is the most prominent Sunni cleric of all and speaks for the world-wide Sunni Muslim community. Both of these important Muslim clerics have strongly condemned fundamentalist extremism and violence; have urged greater understanding between Sunni and Shia branches of Islam, and have been voices for the rights of Christians in the Middle East. The American delegation came away very impressed with these two leaders as important voices within the Muslim community for peace and co-existence.

While with the Grand Imam, Rev. Alexander and I extended an invitation on behalf of the NCC to Dr. El Tayyeb to visit the United States next year. HANDS is hosting a meeting with the NCC on June 20 in which I shall participate to plan details of such a visit.

There is a commitment also to a third dialogue, again in Washington, DC, but a definite date has not been set.

While in Cairo, I took a break from the delegation one evening to visit with the pastor, Rev. Mounir and some members of First Baptist, Cairo. Rev. Mounir was deeply appreciative that I would take the time to visit with them and had high words of praise for ABC and our efforts in dialogue with Muslims in the US as well as the work of IM through Charles Jones in the area. FBC, Cairo is a vibrant congregation that is in the process of completing an addition to their facilities to provide more space for education and community events. While there, I met with a group of young people who were being trained in discipleship and outreach. Evangelism is a delicate issue in Egypt where conversion from Islam though legally acceptable is still culturally taboo. So, too, is the shift viewed of a person moving from the Coptic Orthodox Church to an Evangelical (Protestant) church. So evangelism is done carefully and personally through relationships. When I asked Rev. Mounir to confirm stories I had heard of many Muslims in Egypt and the Middle East becoming inquirers into the Christian faith because of visions they had of Jesus coming to them, he affirmed this is a true phenomenon in the area that can only be explained as a work of the Spirit.

So, I ask your prayers for the work of CEOSS and HANDS for the life and ministry of First Baptist Church, Cairo that God might bless them in their service to Christ and their neighbors.

Thank you for the privilege of representing ABC as General Secretary Emeritus in these ongoing efforts in peace-building.

Yours in Christ,

Roy