

Egypt's humanitarian problems need addressing, say Christian representatives

by [Chris Herlinger](#)

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New York, February 6 (ENInews)--Egyptian Christian humanitarian leaders say while politics and religion are garnering the most attention in their country right now, Egypt's serious humanitarian problems will soon have to be addressed.

As one example, rising food and fuel prices and a drop in foreign currency reserves are making it harder to Egyptians to put food on the table, causing the level of malnutrition to rise in the country.

"This is going to be a serious situation," said the Rev. Andrea Zaki Stephanous, general director of the Cairo-based Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS), a Christian development organization that serves Egyptians regardless of religion and which promotes religious pluralism within Egypt.

In a 2 February interview in New York City, Zaki and other CEOSS staffers said the food problem -- which is particularly acute among Egyptian women and children -- is one of a number of grave problems as the country undergoes a period of continued political change and uncertainty.

As if to underscore that, the interview came the day after 74 people were killed in a stampede following a soccer match in Port Said, Egypt, calling into question the overall state of security right now.

Military rulers have controlled Egypt's national government since the "Arab Spring" uprisings a year ago that toppled the government of former President Hosni Mubarak. Political parties that identify as expressly Islamist, including a party with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, now dominate the nation's parliament.

"While there is no sign of hope now, we believe hope is there," Zaki said, in part because he believes political pragmatists, rather than ideologues, could gain the upper hand politically to help solve the social and humanitarian problems facing Egypt.

"In Egypt we never expected to have a revolution," said Zaki, who is also the vice president of the Protestant Community of Egypt, a council of Egyptian Christian churches.

Egypt, he said, could embrace one of several models in predominately Islamic countries including Pakistan, which has emphasized social conservatism, or Malaysia, which has emphasized economic growth. "Perhaps in Egypt there will be a mixture of both," he said.

Samira Luka Danial, who heads CEOSS's cultural development programs, noted that while the country is experiencing "a crucial, hard, difficult time," it will be up to Christian groups like CEOSS, which believe in religious pluralism, to continue "to do our work" and be in dialogue with various Muslim factions, she said.

CEOSS representatives were in New York City to meet with partner humanitarian agencies including the United Methodist Committee on Relief and Church World Service.

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