

Catholic leaders react to Egyptian presidential election



Coptic Catholic Bishop Joannes Zakaria of Luxor, Egypt. Credit: ACN

Catholic News Agency (<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/catholic-leaders-react-to-egyptian-presidential-election/>)

Cairo, Egypt, Jun 26, 2012 / 12:34 am (CNA).- The victory speech of newly elected Egyptian president Mohammed Morsi has encouraged Coptic Catholic Bishop Joannes Zakaria of Luxor, who expressed optimism about the future despite others' concerns.

“Once people listened to Mr Morsi’s speech, they were not worried. Things are calmer. The people are waiting to see what he can do in the future,” he told Aid to the Church in Need.

The bishop said Christians hope he will honor his promises.

While the Muslim Brotherhood has not lived up to its promises in the past, the bishop said that when a political party is in power with the responsibility of government, it faces a “very different” situation.

He added that the narrow margin of Morsi’s victory means that he will not wish to alienate those who voted for his rival.

Morsi won 51.7 of the vote in the June 16-17 elections, – a margin of 800,000 votes – over opponent Ahmed Shafiq, former President Hosni Mubarak’s last prime minister.

Christians have feared that the party’s apparent openness masks an Islamist agenda that will be intolerant of them. However, the president-elect said June 24 that Egypt is “for all Egyptians” and that everyone has equal rights.

“We Egyptians, Muslims and Christians, are advocates of civilization and construction,” the president-elect said.

In Bishop Zakaria's view, the speech suggested a positive approach to tourism, countering fears that the Muslim Brotherhood would shut it down. He said Christians hope Morsi's new government will involve all parties, not only the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Catholic Coptic Church of Egypt advocated a "civil, democratic and modern state" in its letter of congratulations to President-Elect Morsi.

Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, the apostolic nuncio in Cairo, told the Missionary International Service News Agency that the Church congratulated the president and hoped that he might be able to lead the country "in the interests of all its children, in order to safeguard the cohesion of the social fabric."

President-elect Morsi has said his government will respect international covenants and treaties.

Christians who have voiced concern about the Muslim Brotherhood include Bishop Antonios Mina of Giza, who said last month that the party's rise is worrisome because of its track record of unfulfilled promises of tolerance to non-Islamist groups.

The full power of President-elect Morsi might also be diminished.

Last week the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which has been the interim ruler of the country, issued constitutional amendments that stripped the president's office of most of its major powers. A court has also dissolved Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood-dominated parliament, which was freely elected.

Fr. Raymond J. de Souza, a columnist for the Canadian newspaper The National Post, warned of the possibility of violence and even civil war between the military and the Muslim Brotherhood, with negative consequences for the region, Egypt as a whole, and Christians in particular.