

Christians are loyal to Egypt, Melkite patriarch tells president



Patriarch Gregorios III

Beirut, Lebanon, Jul 3, 2012 (CNA).- Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch Gregorios III emphasized Egyptian Christians' national loyalty, as well as their need for guaranteed human rights, in a letter to Egypt's new president Mohammed Morsi.

“I am proud to be an Egyptian citizen and proud that the Melkite Greek Catholic Church is Egyptian too,” wrote the Damascus-based Eastern Catholic patriarch, who has Egyptian citizenship because of his leadership of the Melkite Church in Alexandria.

The patriarch pledged Egyptian Melkites' “abiding loyalty to Egypt, our country.” He congratulated the new president, and implored God to help him govern the nation wisely “at a turning point in Egypt’s contemporary history and in the wake of events which our Arab world is going through.”

Egyptians represent only a fraction of the world's 1.6 million Melkite Catholics. But their presence – alongside Coptic Orthodox, Coptic Catholics, and other historic Christian groups – is important, Patriarch Gregorios said.

“Our Melkite Greek Catholic children have done a very great deal for Egypt’s progress and prosperity,” he reminded President Morsi, who won 51.7% of the vote in the country's June 16-17 election.

“Today, despite the fact that we are few, we serve Egypt’s sons and daughters through our work of mind and faith, such as through our cultural, educational, school, health, social, artistic and dialogue services, in Cairo, Alexandria and other cities of beloved Egypt.”

The election of Morsi, who symbolically resigned from the Muslim Brotherhood's political party on June 24, has met with mixed responses from observers. The brotherhood, which originally promised not to run a presidential candidate, is seen by some as unreliable and rooted in radical ideology.

But Patriarch Gregorios told President Morsi he was confident in the leader's ability to maintain the nation's role “as pole, pioneer and pilot in the Arab world both inside and outside Egypt.”

He stressed the country's importance for the causes of Arab unity and human rights, calling particular attention to the “Al-Azhar statement” issued by a group of scholars

and intellectuals in the wake of the 2011 Egyptian revolution.

Patriarch Gregorios said this document should serve as the basis for a “modern Arab human rights charter” that could unify the region and safeguard human dignity.

“Egalitarian citizenship,” he reminded President Morsi, is the “mother of all other freedoms.”