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Meeting for Friendship amongst People
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Stories from the World. *Walking next to the Wall*

Christian Copts in Egypt

Rimini, August 28, 2014 – Nobody will ever be able to take a seat in the chair burned to a crisp any longer. Everything has been lost in a Coptic church in Egypt, where a fire raged for 15 hours. Firefighters were unable to extinguish it, and the heat crushed the church's columns of reinforced concrete. Everything has been lost, except the faith of those still alive. A priest picks up the remains of a Bible, which is opened to a page from the prophet Daniel: "We are like Daniel in the midst of lions," he then comments. On the wall an image of Christ and part of his hand can still be seen: "Also Jesus remains."

The video report *Walking next to the Wall*, by Fernando De Haro, was broadcasted in D3, as part of the international series titled "Stories from the World," curated by Roberto Fontolan and Gian Micalessin. This video shows the life of the Copts, a Christian minority in Egypt. The author remarks that: "This is the witness of a people and proof of the possibility that a minority can coexist in a country made up of Muslims."

Copts are Christians who pray using the language of the pharaohs. They carry a tattoo of the cross with twelve points, a symbol of their belonging. This is also a symbol that identifies them, making them victims of attacks. Yet, they do not deny their faith, they don't respond by using violence. They keep going, although they are forced to creep in the shadows, like at the time of the Ottoman Empire.

They don't want to live in a ghetto. The desire to remain within Egyptian society – to which they have always belonged, since they arrived in the country, well before any other Arab – make them the protagonists, although they are persecuted. Similarly in Tahrir Square, they joined the Egyptian people in asking for Mubarak's resignation. This square witnessed, from January 25 and for three weeks in a row, the presence of Muslims and Christians together: "Christians protected Muslims during their worship on Fridays and Muslims did the same for Christians on Sundays."

The Muslim Brotherhood took over the Arab Spring and the attacks on Copts increased, leading up to the massacre in Maspero. October 9, 2011 a peaceful crowd attended a demonstration in Cairo City to support the rights of Christians. More than half of them were women and children. Many carried lighted candles, some prayed. A witness recounted that "once the demonstration arrived in Maspero, under the offices of the national TV, shootings and screaming began. I could not believe my own eyes, when I saw army tanks trying to crush people. The following day, the TV journalist said that it was the crowd that rose up and attacked the army." Twenty-two people died on that day. A young doctor states that: "it is advantageous to be prosecuted, because it gently forces me to give myself valid reasons to affirm my faith." Even a farmer, in the backyard of his house, between his goats and chicken, firmly affirms that: "We are Christians since forever, since the time of Adam and Eve."

Despite this violence, coexistence is ordinary in this country. Muslim mothers accompany their children to Jesuit schools. A priest of the school wonders: "Who burned down our school-buses? They carry both Christian and Muslim children."



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They resist, they want to live. This year, new elections have been announced. The right to build new churches has been acknowledged and a fund in collaboration with the army has been established to rebuild the churches which were destroyed. Our hope is that, one day, it will no longer be necessary to hide and we will all be able to walk together.

(D.T.)

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