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Israeli: Mubarak should have cooperated

by NCR Staff



Protesters gesture during a large gathering in Tahrir Square in Cairo Feb. 8. (CNS photo/Steve Cri sp, Reuters)

Ovadia Keidar, 70, is an Egyptian-born Israeli Jew. During the 1956 Arab/Israeli war, his family was expelled from Egypt and their property confiscated. He lived in Israeli-occupied Sinai until the region was returned to Egypt as a result of the Camp David Accords.

Keidar worked for five years as an agricultural consultant in Egypt. Upon his return to Israel, he organized and managed the Mubarak Project, a program to assist Egyptians settling in the Sinai. Now retired, he farms and supports his wife's activities with Other Voice, a grassroots peace group in southern Israel.

Keidar spoke to *NCR* about the situation in Egypt via e-mail. Following is that exchange, edited for clarity.

NCR: The political situation in the Middle East appears to be changing. How are Israelis, especially those living close to the Egyptian border, perceiving events next door?

Keidar: It seems people cannot live under oppression for so many years even when allegedly given the minimum necessities for their livelihood. I believe the basic policies of the [Mubarak] regime were corroded through corruption -- denying and stealing from simple people. Unfortunately, I find that this is the case in the countries surrounding us.

As an Israeli born in Egypt were you surprised by this recent uprising? How does it compare to previous protests?

I did see this coming but did not know when. In previous attempts, the iron hand of the [Mubarak] regime was more threatening, it seems, and managed to control the uprisings which were not as widespread as [what we are seeing now]. Today, there is an uprising of a large number of people who have reached the end of their tether and have had enough of corruption and oppression.

Their exposure to the media, especially the internet, has enabled them to get their message across to more and more people. This exposure has also allowed Egyptian people to see how life can be lived in the modern world and realize how it is possible to bring forth change, like in Tunisia, for example.

Recognizing predictions are merely predictions, at this point, how might events in Egypt, including the ouster of Mubarak, affect the Israeli/Palestinian conflict?

If the [Egyptian] revolution brings a positive democracy, not ruled by religious fanatics, I believe this could have a positive effect on Israeli/Palestinian relations. If the [new] regime is governed by religious fanatics, as in Gaza, eventually this could lead to war in the region which could result in disaster.


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Do you have any more comments to add about the situation?

I think that the good intentions behind the [Mubarak administration's] privatization program, without some sort of control, intensified the corruption, especially among those close to the administration. Only a few benefited from privatization. As a result, the gap between the poor [in Egypt] and the very rich grew to an unprecedented level.

However there were plans to consider the younger generation -- university students and farmers -- to give them a piece of land as a means of income. Many of those who took part in this project were given agricultural training in Israel and in Egypt. I think that if the [Mubarak] administration could have risen above politics and increased cooperation with Israel in other fields, more [Egyptian] young people would have had opportunities to develop and progress.

That, in itself, would have narrowed the gap between the very rich and the poor.



NCR contributor Claire Schaeffer-Duffy is conducting interviews with people connected to the unrest in Egypt this week. For her previous interviews, see:

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