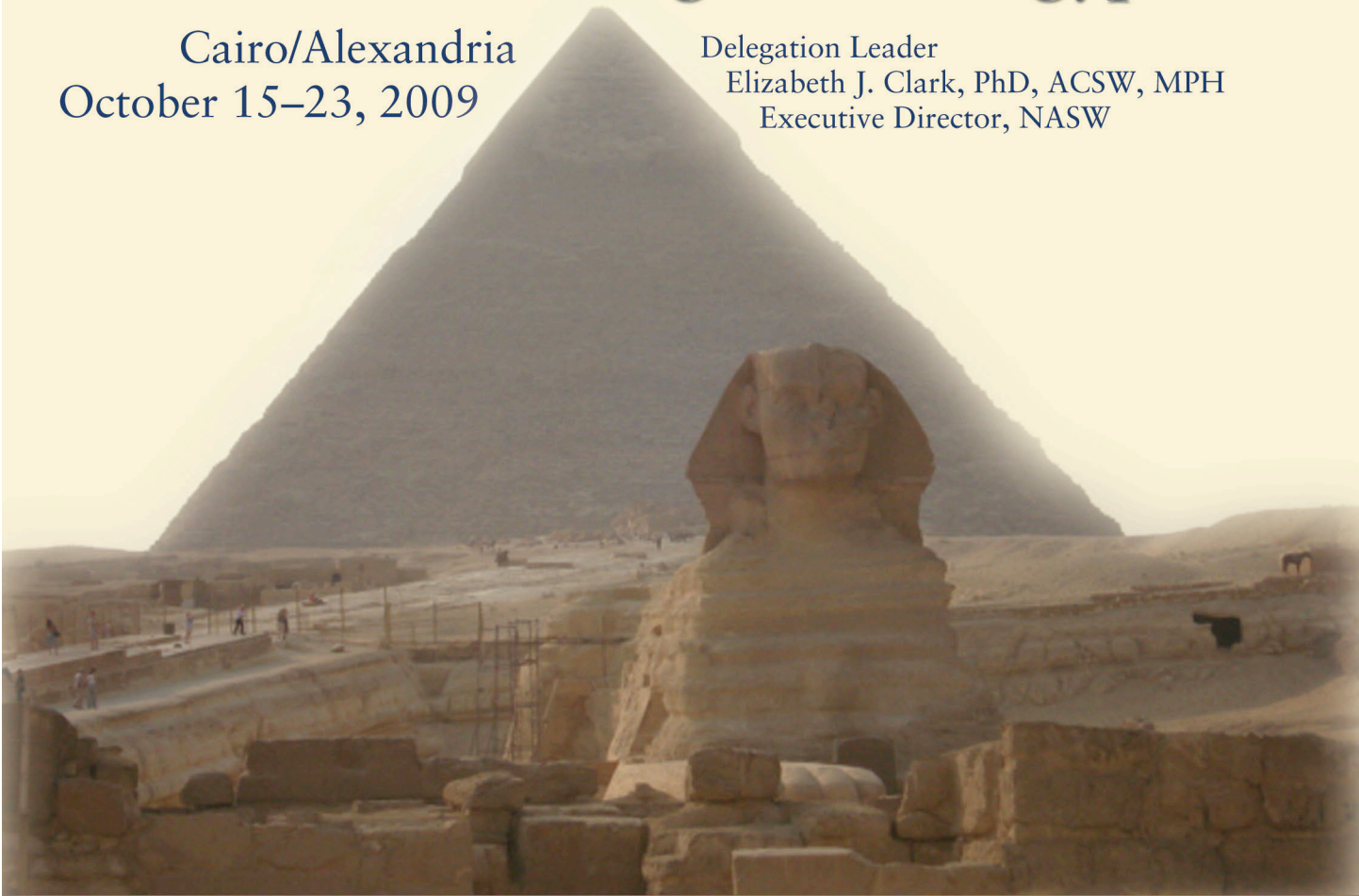




Social Work Delegation to Egypt

Cairo/Alexandria
October 15–23, 2009

Delegation Leader
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Thursday/Friday October 15 – 16 – Arrival in Cairo

Thursday, October 15 was a stormy day on the East Coast. With the exception of one delegate who was coming from Japan, all of the delegates were to meet at the International Terminal at JFK Airport for a 6:30 pm flight to Cairo on Egyptair flight 986. The plane was fairly full. The trip took about 11 hours, and we arrived in Cairo on Friday morning, October 16 about 11:20. We had to purchase a visa for \$15 before exiting the secure area. Once outside, we were met by two Abercrombie & Kent guides who helped us collect our luggage and board our bus. One person's luggage was missing and one delegate had missed the flight because of bad weather.

My first impression of Cairo from the air was that the city was all the color of sand. As we drove to the hotel, you could see that a fine layer of sand dust covered everything.

Friday is the sabbath in Cairo and their weekend is Friday and Saturday. As a result, traffic was fairly light, and we made it to the hotel in about 20 minutes. Our hotel in Cairo was the Semiramis InterContinental Hotel, which is centrally located in the heart of the city on the bank of the Nile River.

We were surprised to find that for security purposes, our luggage had to be scanned and that we had to go through security each time we entered the hotel. The law also requires that every type of transportation for tourists has to be accompanied by an armed guard. That was another new experience for us.

The hotel staff greeted us with trays of cold hibiscus juice. Our rooms had already been secured by our guides, and we simply had to pick up the keys. We were missing keys for two delegates, but the omission was quickly corrected.

We had free time to shower, sleep or explore. Dinner was at our leisure at the hotel restaurant called "Night and Day." It offered a lavish buffet dinner with different food stations. Some delegates visited the nearby museum in the afternoon. Most of us made it an early night.

Saturday October 17, 2009

Morning – Opening Presentations

We had all turned in fairly early on Friday night. The time difference is only six hours, but the flight from Kennedy had been long, and everyone had been tired.

Some of us had a quick breakfast in the hotel restaurant. They have a wonderful buffet selection, plus they cook omelets to your specifications.

We began our program at eight with a coffee hour. The guides and other staff were busy arranging the slide projector and the table for the presenters. We had been told that the Minister of Solidarity was coming himself instead of sending a staff member. That created quite a stir. We

had two additional presenters with whom I had corresponded prior to the trip. They had been quite helpful with suggestions for our program. One was Mrs. Sehir Kansouh-Habib, the past president of the Association of Former International Civil Servants (skansouh@hotmail.com). The other was Dr. Hoda Badran, a former social work professor and the chairperson of the Alliance for Arab Women (hbadran@idse.gov.eg).

We first heard from Mrs. Sehir Kansouh-Habib, who is credited with introducing the concept of social development in the 1990s. While not a professional social worker, she has used social work concepts in her work to increase social development efforts to eliminate disparities. She created the office of ombudsmen for women. She stated that social work must start at the top – it must begin with a political statement from those in leadership.

She gave four specific recommendations regarding social work in Egypt:

- Social work, as a profession, must be promoted. While many people may play the role of social worker, not all of them have the skills to do so. They may follow their own social or religious intentions.
- There needs to be a relationship between social work and ombudsmen. Together they can convey the voice of people who cannot speak for themselves.
- Each non-governmental organization (NGO) working at the grassroots level should have at least one or two managerial positions filled with professional social workers.
- The social and economic problems they are facing are problems of great magnitude – cancer, climate change, poverty, women's rights, among others. Networking among groups trying to bring about change needs to be more systemic and internationalized.

Sehir then introduced Dr. Hoda Badran, a social work professor of renown in Egypt. Dr. Badran gave us an overview of the history of social work in her country.

The first school of social work was established in Alexandria in the 1930s by an American woman married to an Egyptian. Several years later a second school was established in Cairo. It was a graduate program.

In the 1940s, a government run school of social work for girls (see Helwan entry) was established. It was very prestigious and it was difficult for applicants to get through the interview process. Most of the professors came from Columbia University in the USA and from the University of London in the UK. Fieldwork was very important and field placement sites were carefully selected.

She herself studied first to be a sociologist at the American University and then applied to the School of Social Work.

In the 1960s, the University opened the program to men. They wanted to enlarge the program and extend the number of social work graduates, so they made the University totally free. Eventually there were not enough professors or good field placements. The government decided to give employment to any graduate, and many people entered social work jobs unprepared for the work.

Other countries were starting social work graduate programs, and their starting salaries were higher than those in Egypt. As a result, social work professors went elsewhere. Also, the University used only a few textbooks, and this limited the students' perspective. As a result of these factors, the standards for social work in Egypt were lowered.

Then came globalization, and the effect on families and new governments was great. Social work was not strong enough or relevant enough to address the problems and values that globalization brought. She stated that "the oppressor and the oppressed had the same set of values. For instance, they both believed that the poor deserved to be poor."

Dr. Badran noted that there is a great need for a review of their social work system. She said that social work in Egypt was at a crossroads, and that it is time for a change – if they don't change soon, it will only get more difficult in the future. She is hopeful that our visit will give them some fresh ideas and mobilization for change.

The Minister of Solidarity was the next speaker. His Excellency Dr. Ali Al Sayed Ali Al Muselhi was dynamic and charismatic. His staff had loaded slides for him to use, but he disregarded them and spoke directly to the delegates. He said he liked the People to People concept and noted that "peace conditions are the worst thing today" and that people must talk to one another.

The Ministry of Social Solidarity was established by Presidential Decree in 2005 to raise the standard of living and to establish a social safety net for Egyptian citizens. Their major goal is to reduce the number of poor households by 50% by 2015.

The Minister made several strong statements. Among them were:

- Poverty creates poverty.
- The government has to change, not the opposite.
- People are brighter than the government.
- We don't have the courage to admit we don't know how to solve the problems.
- We must see the problems as more than a lack of money – must be comprehensive in approach.
- It is very difficult to help the disadvantaged and poor. They have a shortage of knowledge and a shortage of environmental factors.

- You can't serve people if you don't know them.

His Ministry is geographically targeting families in need. They began with a poverty index and now have a poverty map of Egypt. They are starting with the least developed 1,000 villages and are designing “an integrated social policy” that includes housing, health, transportation and an opportunity for work. They are developing social service centers as a focal point where people can get all needed benefits.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are an important dimension of their plan. There are 27,000 NGOs operating in Egypt. The Ministry outsources management of projects to NGOs and then coordinates the work of NGOs. The Minister emphasized what he referred to as “the last mile problem” – the last mile of communication is the most important.

He ended with some thoughts on peace and cautioned us not to “judge with our own rules” but to “see and describe the reality.” He also asked if we thought Obama would succeed with his health care reform proposal. This was to be a recurrent question from many people during our visit.

Afternoon – Egyptian National Museum

Lunch was held at the Ambassador Club on the 2nd floor of the hotel. We were all pleased that Mrs. Kansouh and Dr. Badran were able to stay for lunch as delegates had many questions for them.



Our afternoon activity was a visit to the Egyptian Museum. I was surprised that the museum wasn't temperature controlled and that parts of it seemed to be in disrepair. Some of the higher windows were broken and lighting was not well planned. The place is huge – with more than 120,000 objects in 107 halls. Our Egyptologist directed us to many of the most important artifacts. One of its most famous collections is the Tutankhamen (or King Tut) exhibit. It includes his funerary mask and sarcophagus and four huge boxes that fit one inside of another. The collection is scheduled to be relocated to a new museum next year. We had some free time to explore several sections of the museum, and we had the opportunity to visit the royal Mummy Room for which we needed a separate entrance ticket. There are 11 mummies including that of Ramses II. The mummies are dark in color and they looked more frightening in reality than some of the famous movies made about them. It actually seemed somewhat sad. Here were the remains of some of the most powerful men and women in Egypt's history, and they had been disinterred and were on display as an oddity.

We returned to the hotel for dinner and our Egyptologist had made arrangements for us to see the evening sight and sound show at the Giza Pyramids. We are scheduled to visit the Pyramids on Thursday. The show was impressive and our first glance of the Sphinx was exciting.

Sunday October 18, 2009

Morning – Awlady Orphanage

Sunday is a regular work day in Egypt, so our first professional visit was to the Awlady Orphanage. It is a large complex with lots of trees and green. It is nicely kept.

The Orphanage was established in 1953 and is registered as an NGO. They have over 300 children who live there. One third of them are under age three.



Because of fears about the H1N1 virus, we had been asked to wear face masks during our visit. They were distributed on the bus before we arrived. The masks were hot and they made it a bit awkward for easy communication.

We were met by a group of small children who sang some songs for us. They appeared to be quite happy and behaved like little children everywhere. Only one or two staff spoke English, so we mainly communicated using our guides as intermediaries. We did meet with several social workers and with the psychologist. We also toured the facilities, which seemed quite adequate. We had taken many gifts, and delegates had pooled funds so we could give a nice donation to the facility.



We learned that the concept of a single mother is not acceptable in Egypt. Therefore, many children are left at the orphanage or at mosques. Adoption as we know it in the USA is not a part of Egyptian culture, and children are not made available for international adoption. A family

could take a child into their home to raise them, but state inheritance laws preclude adoption. This means an orphaned child never has a last name. This creates many problems later in life – with official documents such as licenses and passports. The children live at the orphanage until they are young adults (age 21). There is an emphasis on education and vocational training so that they can find employment opportunities. In the event that the young women get married, the orphanage attempts to provide a dowry for them as is the custom for their country. Alwady also tries to provide financial and emotional support for the young adults, and they remain in contact with them after they leave or marry to give them a sense of family.

After the orphanage, we traveled to the Khan El-Khalili Bazaar, which was founded in the 14th century as a watering stop for caravans. It is now the largest bazaar in the Middle East. Before shopping, we had lunch at the Naguib Mahfouz Restaurant, an Arabian-style restaurant named after the Nobel prize winning Egyptian author. The lunch was served in a very efficient manner and it was delicious. Our guides gave us some brief lessons about shopping and bartering in the

market. We had about an hour to wander through the market. Fortunately, we were there during what is usually the after-lunch rest, so other shoppers were minimal. Some of shops were closed during that time, too. One lesson we learned was not to wear our name badges while shopping. The shopkeepers would call you by name and try to get your attention that way. They were fairly aggressive. We needed to be at the Children's Cancer Center at 2 pm so we had limited time at the bazaar.



Afternoon – Children's Cancer Center

The Children's Cancer Center opened in 2007. It is a state-of-the-art center that is a flagship facility for the Middle East. It has 182 inpatient beds, 10 ICU beds, 22 outpatient clinics, and 82 physicians on staff. It is modeled after St. Jude's Hospital in the US, and any children with cancer are treated for free.

The most frequent childhood cancers are brain tumors and leukemia. Only 40% of children survive cancer in Egypt. This is about half of the survival rate in the USA. They hope to improve this number with outstanding health care.

They began fundraising for the hospital in 2000. As part of their fundraising campaign, they named the project after their bank account number, and the hospital is now known as 57357. They started with \$14 million pounds. Most of the funds raised were small donations from people who made charitable contributions during Ramadan. Schoolchildren also helped raise funds.



The Center's psychosocial care is headed by a psychiatrist and includes social workers (8 of them), psychologists, and child life therapists. Social workers there make about \$300 per month. The Cancer Center noted that they were quite surprised that our delegation wanted to visit. They told us that they would welcome assistance with training for psychosocial oncology.

Evening – Dinner with Local Families in Cairo



One of the nicest parts of our People to People exchange is the opportunity to have dinner at the homes of local families. This was the event for the evening. Since our delegation was fairly small, we divided into two groups and visited the homes of two related families who lived in the same building. The host family for our group was the Taher family. General Asseme Taher is a police officer. His wife did the cooking and his married daughter – who held a professional job – was the hostess.

Both families prepared authentic Egyptian dishes that were delicious, and we had a delightful evening of conversation and learned a bit about family life in Egypt. One of the families had a framed saying on a table, which seemed to sum up the significance of our complete trip. It read:

Once you have looked into the eyes of people in a foreign country, you realize you all want the same thing: food on your table, love in your marriage, healthy children, laughter, freedom to be. The religion, the ideology, and the government may be different, but the dreams are all the same.

What was most surprising was that the author of the statement was the late columnist Erma Bombeck.

We had no sooner gotten on the bus to return to the hotel when one delegate became violently ill. The guides showed great concern, and we stopped at a pharmacy to see if a pharmacist could recommend something. Many pharmacists in Egypt are medical doctors, but this particular pharmacist was unhelpful, and we continued on to the hotel. Because her condition had not improved, a doctor was sent for and he arrived at the hotel about midnight. Unfortunately, her condition had not improved enough for her to travel with us to Alexandria the next day. She rejoined our group when we returned to Cairo.

Monday October 19, 2009

Morning – Travel to Alexandria, Catacombs of Kom al-Shoqafa, and the Library of Alexandria

We had a very early start today – a wake-up call at 5:30. We had the luggage loaded and were on the bus by 8:30 for our trip to Alexandria. Morning traffic in Cairo was chaotic. Eventually, we left the city limits and saw some countryside. We saw people working on their small farms, passed military bases, and gated communities. We also passed an area of electronic businesses, which is referred to as Smart City.

About half way we stopped at a rest stop that had a variety of shops and cafes. There are only two of these on the way to and from Alexandria, and the guide said the owners have become millionaires because of all the summer traffic between the two cities.

Our first stop on the outskirts of Alexandria was the Catacombs of Kom al-Shoqafa, the most impressive of Alexandria's ancient remains. Constructed in the 2nd century A.D., the site was discovered at the end of the 1800s. There are three tiers of tombs, and a long spiral staircase (about 90 steps) leads to the main hall where a few rooms branch off from there. The lowest level contained a number of smaller nooks for storing bodies. It was easy to feel claustrophobic, and we were happy to get above ground again.

Alexandria Library

We next visited the Alexandria Library, which many people refer to as one of the modern wonders of the world. They wanted to resurrect the Great Library of Alexandria, once one of the world's major centers of learning. It had been founded by Ptolemy I in the 4th century B.C., and was said to have a collection of 500,000 volumes – all written by hand. It eventually was destroyed by fire.



The building is an amazing structure. It is of Norwegian design in the shape of the rising sun. It cost \$190 million to build and has been sponsored by UNESCO.



There are eight levels, four of which are below sea level. Everything is new and impressive. It has the largest reading room in the world – 2000 people can read at one time. It is designed so that no natural light can come directly into the library, but it is quite light. Green and blue lights are used for ambiance. It is open to everyone, but there is a fee to use it.

It was built to hold eight million books, but it is also a facility to store knowledge in all its forms. They have accumulated 650,000 books so far. They also have over 3000 computer terminals that you can reserve for one hour. There is a conference center that can hold 1700 people and there is a planetarium.

One of their most fascinating activities is building an Internet archive. Each day since 1996, they take copies of every web page of the internet and archive them. (They normally expire in 100 days.) It is difficult to imagine the magnitude of the task. They are also working with China with the goal of digitizing 1.5 million books in two years. They have one of the world's fastest printers. There are only 18 of them in the world. It only takes two seconds per page. When fully operational, anyone will be able to copy a 500 page book in minutes. In addition, the library houses one of the oldest printers in the world and it has the documented history of the Suez Canal.

Anyone can have access to their Website (www.bibalex.org) and it is certainly worth a visit. Not all projects, however, are translated into English. There is no charge to use the Website. The time allotted for our visit to the Library seemed a bit short. Many of us would have liked more time to explore it further.

Lunch for the day was planned for the restaurant at the Hilton Hotel, which is right at the Library. There was some confusion about the amount of time we had to explore the Library, so not everyone arrived at lunch at the same time. Further complicating things was the fact that we had to ascend some rather steep stairs and one delegate couldn't make it up the stairs. One of our guides took her into a coffee shop on the ground floor and bought her lunch there.

The meal was a full dinner, but we felt a bit rushed because we had started late. A nice touch was that it was one delegate's birthday, and the guides had ordered a lovely birthday cake for her.

We had a fairly short visit at the Alexandria National Museum, which opened in 2003. It's a rather small collection, but an outstanding one that shows the history of the people of Alexandria. It includes artifacts raised during excavations around Alexandria in recent years.



The building is an old palace of Italian design. It was sold to America for the American consulate in 1960. It was repurchased by the Egyptian Ministry of Culture in 1997. One of the best things about it was that the building was air conditioned – a nice relief for a hot day.

There were four stories and a basement that served as an air raid shelter during World War II. The basement now houses a replica of a tomb containing a mummy along with funerary equipment.

Despite the fairly small size of the building, the museum has over 1800 artifacts. It nicely intertwines items as old as the Pharaonic era, including painted mummy cases, with classic Greek statues from the Greco-Roman era. There is also a significant collection of ancient perfume bottles, jewelry from Egypt's former first family, and 162 gold and silver coins minted in Alexandria.

There was a very small gift shop that offered some nice selections and books relevant to the collection.

THE HIEROGLYPHIC ALPHABET



Afternoon - Shopping

We were going to visit the Roman Theatre in the afternoon, but we felt it was too hot, so it was rescheduled for the next morning. Instead we went to an upscale shopping area where we enjoyed shopping for cartouches and visiting a papyrus store where they manufactured original papyrus and reproduced beautiful paintings on it.

After shopping, we slowly wound through rush hour traffic and finally got to our hotel, the Sheraton Montazah Hotel about 6:00 p.m. Check-in went quickly and smoothly. We were all struck by the size of our rooms – quite small in comparison to the hotel in Cairo. The hotels in Alexandria have smaller rooms to

accommodate the large number of summer tourists.

In the evening several of us opted for dinner at a near-by Chili's restaurant – an American chain. It was nice to have familiar food, but we were disappointed that the Margaritas were made without alcohol.

The hotel was across the street from the Montazah Gardens, part of the El Montazah palace built in the late 1800s. It was a lovely evening, and several delegates went for a walk in the formal gardens.

Tuesday October 20, 2009

Morning – Roman Amphitheater and the Suzanne Mubarak Centre

We started the day driving along the Mediterranean. The coastline of the city now stretches 10 miles. The city of Alexandria is cleaner than Cairo, and they have campaigns against littering. The problem is that the city was never designed to hold 5 million people. The section of Alexandria we are staying in is quite different from sections we saw yesterday.

It was a lovely, breezy morning so we started with a visit to the Roman Theatre. It was first built in the 4th century and rebuilt in the 6th after an earthquake. It was found accidentally when the area was being cleared to build an apartment complex. It is now being excavated by the University of Warsaw and the Polish government.

It is not technically an amphitheatre (it is only 3/4 round) but was more of a stage. There are areas probably used for dressing rooms underneath. The Romans were known for comedy and pantomime. It was also probably used for teaching and lectures. They don't believe it was used for physical activities. The stone seats have still have Latin numbers on them.



Next we visited The Suzanne Mubarak Regional Centre for Women's Health and Development (SMC) in Alexandria. This is a special program of Mrs. Mubarak, the First Lady of Egypt, and it is part of the national budget. We met with the director of women's development, Mrs. Khagida Khashana and her staff and toured the state-of-the art facilities. They have been in operation for two years.

Their posters use the tag line of "Breaking the Silence in Egypt." Their mission statement is linked to the WHO definition:

The mission of the SMC is to promote women's health and development in Egypt and friendly neighboring countries, health being a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, and is closely linked to women's development.



They emphasized that their definition includes “a healthy sexual and reproductive life.” Their long-term goals are to combat illness, ignorance, poverty and to support women's rights.

Their outreach and community organizing focus is reaching school teachers, social workers, and NGOs to get women referred for their services and as settings for their educational programs which also include skill building. In addition to routine care in areas such as obesity and diabetes, cancer screenings, bone health and antismoking, they do genetic markers, microeconomics, and productive skills for refugees.

They have a mobile clinic for breast cancer for women in rural areas, and they are just starting a breast cancer survivorship program. They are partnering with the Susan G. Koman organization from the USA and they were having their first “Walk for the Cure” at the pyramids later this week.

They told us that AIDS is not a serious problem in Egypt, nor is there much rape because of their social culture and because rape is a major crime punishable by death. However, domestic violence and genital mutilation are both problems. One of the things they try to do is to teach women that neither is a part of their religion. They said that women in Egypt don't talk about violence, even to each other. Thus, the tag line above about breaking the silence. They are also training doctors to detect battering, and Mrs. Mubarak has created a Women's Council to help battered women with legal problems.

For more information on the Women's Centre, see www.smcalex.org.

Afternoon – Lunch at the Fish Market

Our next stop was lunch at an incredibly beautiful restaurant called the Fish Market. It was an open air restaurant overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. The view, the weather, and the food were all spectacular. It was a delightful hour or so. The only negative was that there were several flights of stairs up to the restaurant and no elevator. One or two of our delegates had some difficulty managing the stairs. Many of the sites and venues in Egypt are not handicap accessible. That's something we almost take for granted in the United States.

Wednesday October 21, 2009

Morning – Travel to Cairo

Another early start. Check-out at the hotel went smoothly and each of us was given a box lunch to take with us on our return bus trip to Cairo. Once again, we stopped at a rest stop-restaurant complex about midway. Delegates were able to use the restrooms and get coffee.

We had asked our Egyptologist, Mohamed Ossama, to discuss the government system in Egypt, and he did so after our stop.

He explained that Egypt is a democracy but there are no term limits for President. President Mubarak has been in office for 28 years. There is a People's Assembly somewhat like the House of Representatives in the United States. Their Assembly has 450 people – two elected from each district for a total of 440 plus the President appoints 10 people. There are 18 political parties, and people tend to vote for individuals rather than a party. There are also 32 Ministers, the small number of which shows the significance of our meeting with the Minister of Solidarity. The Ministers sound like the President's cabinet members in the US. The similarities of the Egyptian and US governments are more striking than the differences.

We arrived back at the Semiramis InterContinental Hotel where we hurriedly got our luggage and checked in. We were happy to have Karolina de Maciejowska rejoin the delegation. She had remained behind in Cairo because she had become ill.

Our first visit of the afternoon was the Cairo Evangelical Hospice.

Afternoon – Cairo Evangelical Hospice

We had wanted to visit an Egyptian hospice, and we were able to secure a visit to the Cairo Evangelical Hospice. The hospice program is a relatively new program that combines long-term care for the elderly and hospice. It was recently opened by the Cairo Evangelical Medical Society.

We met with several key people. Dr. Naguib Meinikhaily (Nmeinikhaily@hotmail.com) was our main contact and host. He is the Vice Chair of the Board of Directors for the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services. Also present was the Reverend Doctor Basheer Nody, the Pastor of the Evangelical Church of Giza and the General Secretary of the Medical Centre. Finally, we were welcomed by one of the founders, Mrs. Nadia Menes (Menesnoor@kdec.org). In addition to helping to found the hospital 15 years ago, Mrs. Menes is the founder and owner of the only women's Christian magazine in the Middle East. Her husband is a minister. She explained that the Presbyterian Church has owned the area where the hospital is located for over 100 years.

Another attendee was the hospital founder who is a surgeon and is in his 80s. It was a great honor to have him attend our meeting. He began his career as a medical missionary. He still does surgery several times a week.

Few staff spoke English, so communication was a bit difficult. They did, however, have a nurse geriatric consultant from Iowa. She was delightful. She noted that her goal is to find ways to improve how long-term care is delivered in Egypt. Like the Children's Cancer Center, they emphasized the great need for nurses in Egypt. The government will give a visa for volunteers to come and train nurses, and the hospital will give them a place to live.

The vision of their program is that “God uses their facility for outreach.” The hospice is in the heart of Cairo and serves an extremely low-income community. They are accessible to all who need care, regardless of the ability to pay. They are welcoming of many refugees and allocate a

percentage of their beds for refugees who are victims of conflict. They serve many Sudanese and they have a Sudanese pastor on staff. There are over 6 million Sudanese in Egypt, but they are not recognized as refugees. This is due to an agreement between the two governments, that the Sudanese are considered Egyptians. They did note, however, that they do not provide service for refugees from Gaza.

At the conclusion of our formal meeting, they wanted us to meet some patients. That activity became somewhat confusing because of the size of our delegation. When we entered a room, family members would often ask us to pray for them and their loved ones.

There were several famous residents in their facility. One is a caricature artist named Ramsis who is known for his political caricatures. He used to have a television show that many people followed. Our Egyptologist was quite surprised to see Ramsis there. He had just sort of disappeared and people thought he had died. He is known for drawing a caricature a minute, and he did them for several of us.

Another resident was Dr. Martha Roy, a 100-year old American missionary who has lived her whole life in Egypt. She is a wonderful musician and scholar. She has written several books in both English and Arabic. She still plays the organ every week.

The hospital is the usual configuration of an acute care hospital, including surgery, outpatient clinics, and a hemodialysis unit which is open only three days per week. They noted they have a waiting list for dialysis. They train physicians as well as hospice workers from Britain. They are quite concerned about quality of life. They offer psychological services, but have a lack of mental health services. There were no social workers employed there, but they would welcome any social workers from the USA who could volunteer to assist them.

Old Cairo

Many of us were disappointed that there hadn't been a visit scheduled for the delegates to see Old Cairo. The guests had done so earlier. Our Egyptologist offered to take those of us who were interested on a short visit later in the afternoon. About half the group went. We arrived for the ending of the day's market activity – the vendors selling fruits, vegetables, fish, and other wares.

We saw the remains of the Fortress of Babylon, which was built by the Persians around the 6th century B.C. These ruins are Cairo's oldest original structure.

While in the area, we visited the Church of St. Sergius where it is claimed that Mary, Joseph and Jesus stayed for awhile during their six years in Egypt. The paintings within the church were fabulous – they appeared to have parts that were painted in gold. We hastily visited another site or two, and even had a few minutes for shopping. It would have been nice to have a bit more time, but we were glad to get there regardless.



Thursday October 22, 2009

Morning – Helwan University

Our delegation was received today by the social work faculty of Helwan University. We were met by the Dean, Prof. Dr. Maher Abo Elmaate, and by the Vice Deans for Post Graduate Studies and for Community Organization. Their faculty mission is “Preparing a high quality social worker able to apply the skills of dealing with social work systems and influencing them for making changes for developing the community and individuals.” They explained their programs and that they use the CSWE standards as a guide. They also were quick to point out that they had the latest version of *The Encyclopedia of Social Work* published by NASW.



We discussed the challenges facing social work in our respective countries. One theme in common was the need for a clearer understanding of what social workers do. We mentioned the need for tuition assistance and loan forgiveness for social work students in the USA. They do not have that problem because their University is government run and undergraduates can attend at almost no cost and MSWs pay a small sum. Doctoral students pay a bit more, perhaps \$400 per year. Since they are government run, they accept only Egyptian and Palestinian students.

We toured their computer lab and library, which housed all of the theses and dissertations that have been completed on their campus. It was an impressive number. They are working at building a data base for their research and community projects.

We discussed the Social Work Reinvestment Act that US social work has pending in Congress. They thought that was a good idea.

Helwan University is the oldest program of social work in the Middle East and Africa. It was established as a Higher Institute for Social Work for women in 1946. They opened admission to men in 1975 when Helwan University was established by Presidential Decree. The University has a focus on applied arts and sciences.

The University offers social work degrees at the bachelor's, master's and doctoral levels as well as a postgraduate diploma in social work. The faculty are divided into five departments of social casework, social group work, community organization, social planning, and field work. Students at the bachelor's level can choose from the following specializations: planning and development; school social work and youth welfare; juvenile and social defense; organizing and development of slum areas and local communities; and handicapped and family welfare.

The postgraduate diploma in social work appears to be a level between our BSW and the MSSW. The diploma can be obtained in 24 diverse social work fields including areas like population and

family planning, addictions, tourism, social security, labor, prisoner care, administration, armed forces, non-governmental organizations, and relief work. The diploma can be obtained in 2-4 semesters. The MSSW requires a master's thesis and students are expected to spend three years on their research. The doctorate requires the completion of the MSW and an additional 6-10 basic semesters.

The school is very active in community development and action programs and takes great pride in their accomplishments. At the conclusion of our meeting, we were interviewed by Nile Television. They were interested in knowing how we felt Egypt was progressing in social programs.

Afternoon – The Pyramids

This afternoon we visited the pyramids. We had been looking forward to this adventure all week. Unfortunately, it was a very hot, sunny afternoon. Our Egyptologist provided the following information about the pyramids before we left the bus:



- A pyramid is a staircase to help your soul ascend to heaven.
- There are still 141 pyramids in Egypt.
- The stone quarry used was only 2000 feet from the Sphinx.
- There are no actual written documents about how pyramids were made.
- There are actually nine pyramids on the Giza Plateau.

The oldest and largest pyramid, called Khufu's Pyramid or Cheops in Greek, covers 13 acres. Each side is 478 feet tall. It is made of 2.3 million blocks of stone and each stone varies from 1-55 tons. The average weight per stone is two tons. The total weight is 4.6 million tons. Original height was 30 feet higher than now due to the earth settling. The pyramid took over 20 years to build for Pharaoh Khufu.

The second largest pyramid is Khafre's Pyramid (Chephren), that of Khufu's son. Menkaure's Pyramid (Mycerinus) is the smallest of the kings' pyramids. Archaeologists believe that the Giza pyramids were built within a few hundred years of each other by generations of the same royal family around 2600 BC. There are three smaller pyramids (for the queens). These are called queen pyramids.

Our Egyptologist suggested that we might go to see an ancient long boat in the Solar Boat Museum between the pyramids. I'm glad I didn't miss this exhibit. In 1954, it was found in 1200 pieces and was put back together over a 14-year period. It is made of cedar and is over 4000 years old.

The more adventuresome delegates took a short camel ride. The camels looked scraggly and the smell was a bit off-putting. Still, the individuals who chose that activity said they were glad they had done it.

One negative were the vendors. They were everywhere and overly aggressive. They each had the same sales pitch – make eye contact, find out what country you were from, offer you a gift, tell you how much they love Obama and the USA, and ask for money. They were unwilling to take “no” for an answer. They put things in your purse, tried to put scarves on your head or around your neck and became increasingly adamant. At one point our guard had to come and “rescue” some of us. As soon as he appeared, the vendors dissipated.



After the pyramids, we visited the Great Sphinx. The Sphinx is the largest statue in Egypt. It is 300 feet long by 90 feet high. It has the body of a lion, and the head of a king, thought to be Khafre.

The pathway leading up to the Sphinx was very crowded. It was only about eight to ten feet wide, and people had to use it for both coming and going to the viewing areas. The congestion made several people feel a bit claustrophobic.

It is hard to describe the power of something so massive and it is harder still to try and understand how it was built. Most of us learned about the Sphinx in elementary school, and we have watched it be portrayed in various movies and television specials over the years. Nothing comes close to seeing the real thing. People kept using words like “amazing” and “unbelievable” – and it was both. It was truly one of the highlights of the trip.

We returned to the hotel to get ready for our farewell banquet. It was held at a restaurant called Al Azhar Park in old historic Cairo. The evening was beautiful, and we ate outdoors. The food and the ambience were both wonderful. We saluted the delegate whose luggage had just arrived that day. She had been very flexible and non-complaining. We also thanked our guides and Egyptologist for helping us have such a remarkable journey.

We had a very early start tomorrow for the trip back to the USA or the flight to Aswan for those going on the extension.

Friday October 23, 2009

Only six of us were able to stay for the Nile cruise extension, which was a wonderful experience. We felt very fortunate that our Egyptologist, Mohamed Ossama, was able to accompany us. He has a way of making history come alive.



We flew to Aswan, a rural area, very different from Cairo. It felt like we had moved back in time thousands of years to biblical Egypt. There were palm trees, small villages, goat herders and children playing in the Nile.

Before going to the cruise ship we visited many sites, including the Aswan high dam and the granite quarries (where a huge obelisk was still partially carved into the stone). The Aswan High Dam was an impressive modern structure that was built to ensure an adequate water supply for people along the Nile. Two facts struck me. One was that the dam (like dams everywhere) had changed much about the land. For example, since its building, there have been no hippos in Egypt.

The second fact explained by our Egyptologist is that if the dam were destroyed, it would destroy much of Egypt. He said that all of Cairo would be under water within 12 hours. He also said some people believe that building the dam mortgaged the safety of their children and future generations, a similar argument we hear in our country about ecological issues versus economic progress.

It was a very hot day, and the granite quarries had no shade whatsoever. We didn't spend a great deal of time there, but we did see a huge obelisk that had been left in the ground. Once again we marveled at the abilities of the people from ancient Egypt. Their mining tools and techniques seemed rudimentary, but obviously functional. For example, they used wood soaked in water to help prepare the cutting area. The wood would be packed around a cut area and then water would be added. The wet wood expanded helping prepare more space for the carving of the granite. The quarry we visited supplied most of the hard stone used in the pyramids and temples. It is fairly near the Nile, and boat transportation of the cut stones and obelisks was another incredible feat.



We next boarded our ship, The Nile Adventure, which was quite lovely. It had just been refurbished and there were 61 crew to meet the needs of 50 passengers. The captain and staff were gracious and welcoming. As is the custom with cruises, our delegation had an assigned table for meals. In the evenings, they offered a variety of entertainment.

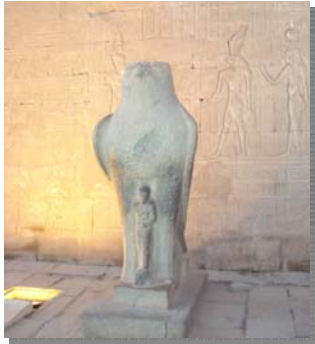
One night was "Egyptian night." We were asked to come in galabeyas and Egyptian dress. We had fun finding scarves and other accessories for the event.



Late that first afternoon, we traveled by boat to Philae Temple on the Island of Agika. No matter where we went, people recognized Mohammed Ossama. They appeared to have a great deal of respect for him, and as a result, we often got exceptional service.



Saturday, October 24



During breakfast, we had cruised to Kom Ombo and we spent the morning visiting the Kom Ombo Temple, which was dedicated to the Crocodile God Sobek. In ancient times, sacred crocodiles basked in the sun on the rocks of the riverbank. We did not see any crocodiles. We went back to the boat for lunch and some delegates participated in an Egyptian cooking lesson. The weather was pleasant, and it was relaxing to sit on the top deck to watch the sites.

In the afternoon, we visited the magnificent Temple of Horus at Edfu. It is the largest and most completely preserved Pharaonic temple in Egypt, even though it was built by the Greeks. We took hundreds of photographs and had opportunity to explore on our own or in small groups.

We returned to the boat and had some time for shopping at the vendor stalls. The vendors were as aggressive as the ones in Cairo. Overnight, our boat cruised to Luxor.

Sunday, October 25

For comfort, we had been leaving the boat early in the morning. Then we would return for a few hours for lunch and to escape the midday heat. Then we would go out again in late afternoon. That schedule worked quite well.

First on today's agenda was a visit to Hatshepsut Temple. Hatshepsut was Ancient Egypt's only female Pharaoh. The temple appeared to be carved out of the limestone cliffs surrounding it. It is massive in size and much of it is still in good condition. The structure is so imposing that it made you feel quite small as you walked up the ramp to the entrance. On one side of the temple, the ceiling is still vibrant blue and dotted with stars. This was a recurrent theme in the temples we visited – a tribute to the Goddess Nut.





In front of the temple was a smaller structure, also in the shape of a temple. This was the “Birthing Temple” for women. Another fascinating structure was the “Nileometer.” This looked like a very deep well. It is somehow connected by tunnel to the Nile River, and by measuring the level of the water, they could predict floods and drought and prepare for them.

We next visited the Valley of the Kings and Queens. It was a very hot day, with little relief from the sun. We all went into King Tutankhamun’s tomb where his mummy still resides, and our ticket allowed us to explore four other open tombs of our choice. About 60 tombs have been excavated so far, but they believe there are over 200 additional tombs in the area.



We made a stop at a wonderful art and souvenir shop where we watched some of the artisans working on carving granite. They had a selection of artwork, and several delegates made substantial purchases.

We once again returned to our boat for lunch and for a welcome relief from the heat. In late afternoon, we turned our attention to the East Bank of Luxor. We spent a great deal of time at the Temple of Luxor, which is dedicated to the god Amun.



Once again, we were struck by its massive size. It was quite crowded, and we occasionally lost track of Mohammed, who was a very fast walker. There was a lot to see and the opportunity for photography was terrific. We were there as it grew dark which gave it a different dimension. The carved columns were beautiful. On one side of the temple, a modern mosque had been built over a part of the temple. When they excavated the temple, they left the mosque standing. It was an incredible juxtaposition of periods of history.

At night, the temple and the walkway between Luxor and Karnak Temple is beautifully lighted. The walkway, at one time, was lined with 3000 carved sphinxes. Some of them were still in good shape. They are smaller than The Sphinx, but still of good size. They differ from The Sphinx because they have the head of a ram instead of a person.

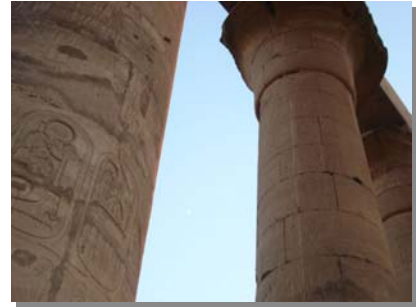
We had decided to leave Karnak Temple for the morning, so we returned to the boat for a farewell dinner of gourmet cuisine followed by entertainment that included a whirling dervish performance.



Monday, October 26

After getting our luggage on the van and checking out of the Nile Adventure, we had time to stop at Karnak Temple before heading to the airport.

We could have spent days exploring the area of Karnak Temple. It covered 64 acres and took 2300 years to build by generations of pharaohs. It was simply overwhelming in size and scope. It has a great “Hypostyle Hall” which can be described as a “forest of giant pillars.” It seemed like each successive pharaoh tried to outdo the previous one. We took dozens of pictures, but it was difficult to absorb two thousand years of history in two hours.



We headed next to the airport at Luxor for our flight back to Cairo. In-country flights seem quite efficient. As usual, we were met by our guides and the transfer back to our hotel went smoothly. We checked back into the Semiramis for our final night in Egypt. We had the afternoon free to do some shopping and to try to make everything fit into our luggage.

Tuesday, October 27

Our wake-up call was scheduled for 5 AM, and luggage had to be available for collection at 5:45. We had a quick breakfast together in the hotel coffee shop, and then it was off to Cairo International Airport for our flights home.

Our People to People trip to Egypt was an incredible journey. It intertwined over four thousand years of history with modern times. It provided us the opportunity to learn a bit about another culture while also showing us the similarities between our countries, especially some of the social problems we each currently face. We also met social workers and other professionals who share our value base and are committed to improving the quality of life for their citizens.

Our next social work delegation will visit Russia in August, 2010. More information will be sent shortly.

Also, please remember that pictures can be uploaded to www.flickr.com/photos/nasw/ so that we all can keep them as memory souvenirs of our trip.

Thank you for traveling with us.