



For immediate release

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**CHILDREN MARCH TO PROTEST THE CONTINUED PRACTICE OF
FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION IN EGYPT**

March Organized After Procedure Leads to Death of 12 Year Old

WASHINGTON, DC, July 12, 2007 — Coptic Orphans joined together with other organizations and citizens to protest the continued widespread practice of female genital mutilation in Egypt on July 4, marching in the Egyptian province of Assuit. The groups, which included 20 girls participating in the Valuable Girl Project sponsored by Coptic Orphans, organized the March in the wake of the recent death of 12 year old Bedour Shaker, who died while being subjected to female circumcision at an illegal clinic in Assuit.

The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) organized the march, which included groups such as the National Red Crescent Society and the Coptic Orphans partner Association of Upper Egypt for Education and Development. Participants carried signs often featuring Bedour Shaker's picture and messages such as "No to FGM," "We don't want FGM for our Girls," and "Give Us a Law to Protect Us."

Female circumcision, or female genital mutilation, refers to the intentional removal of or damage to the external female genitalia. It is believed in Egypt and other parts of Africa and the Middle East to preserve a girl's honor.

Despite global concerns, female genital mutilation remains commonly practiced in Egypt. UNICEF estimated in 2005 that 97% of women between the ages of 15 and 45 have been subjected to the practice, and Egypt's Ministry of Health and Population concludes in a recent survey that at least 50 percent of girls between the ages of 10-18 years in Egypt have undergone genital mutilation.

Suzanne Mubarak, Egypt's first lady, says that even with current widespread practice, "Bedour's death is the beginning of the end for female circumcision in Egypt... the most vicious practice committed against women." Coptic Orphans joined the march last week to ensure that it is indeed the beginning of the end for female genital mutilation.

One girl who participated in the march from the Valuable Girl Project commented: "we have talked a lot about this practice, but marching for it has left a great impact on us. We must get this message to the whole world."

Coptic Orphans is an award-winning international Christian development organization that works with vulnerable children in Egypt to transform their local communities by breaking the cycles of poverty and injustice through literacy, education, advocacy, mentoring, and basic needs. Since the founding of the organization in 1988, Coptic Orphans has touched the lives of over 14,000 children in Egypt.

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