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CRS moves some staff out of Egypt

by Judith Sudilovsky by Catholic News Service

JERUSALEM -- Catholic Relief Services' international staff and their families in Cairo were evacuated as pro-democracy demonstrations entered their seventh day.

"Our current thinking is that we will be out for no more than two days," CRS country representative Jason Berlinger said in a phone interview with Catholic News Service Jan. 31 as he was on his way to Cairo's international airport with his wife and two children.

He said he was traveling with two other American staff members and their dependents and the group planned to fly to Amman, Jordan. However, flights to the Jordanian capital were unavailable late Jan. 30 and were not expected to resume soon, according to news reports.

About 25 Egyptian staff members of the U.S. bishops' aid and development agency remained at home, Berlinger said. One Palestinian staff member was scheduled to leave for Amman as well, he said.

The CRS office was closed for the Egyptian Friday-Saturday weekend Jan. 28 and 29, but did not reopen Jan. 30, Berlinger said.

"The office is closed today (Jan. 31) and tomorrow (Feb. 1) and we are monitoring the situation," Berlinger said.

"It is just a wait and see situation," he said.

Military personnel and armed community guard groups checked identification cards as the staffers left their Cairo neighborhood, said Berlinger, who described traffic on the road to the airport as normally heavy and appeared largely to be made up of Americans and other internationals.

The U.S. State Department announced Jan. 30 that it would send planes to evacuate Americans.

Meanwhile, the airport was overwhelmed by thousands of foreigners, many of whom arrived without reservations because the government had disrupted Internet access and cell phone service beginning Jan. 27.

Berlanger said the international staff of the Evangelical Lutheran Church Association left the Egyptian capital early Jan. 31, while the international staff of CARE International was undecided about evacuating.

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Caritas Egypt staff in Cairo could not be reached.

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