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York police add patrols, heighten security

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assure you that your government and our Prime Minister stand with you," the Stouffville resident said. "The recent cowardly attacks on the Coptic people in Egypt will only strengthen our resolve to help all people worship, celebrate and practice their faith free from

oppression, discrimination and violence."

"As your Member of Parliament, I am proud that you have made your home here in Stouffville. Our community is a better place because you are here and I want you to know that I will always be here for you," Mr. Calandra said.

Because the Orthodox Church observes the Julian calendar, Copts cel-

brate the birth of Christ as being Jan. 7, as opposed to Dec 25.

Other Canadian Coptic churches have cancelled part of their celebrations following an attack in Alexandria on New Year's Day that left at least 23 dead.

York Regional Police has added patrols at Coptic Christian congregations in the region and put officers on heightened alert, diversity and cultural resources bureau Insp. Ricky Veerappan said.

That same police response would be extended to any York community — religious, ethnic, cultural, or otherwise — when safety concerns are raised, he added.

"The message to all of our communities is the same," Insp. Veerappan said. "We are here to safeguard the fundamental human rights of all people."

There have been no reports of threats made against York's Coptic Christian community, according to York police.

The diversity bureau, which employs a 21-offi-

cer hate crime unit, has a mandate to work with diverse communities in the region and investigate hate crimes, Insp. Veerappan said.

York officers are taken on tours of places of worship as part of their training, in order to help understand tensions that may exist between religions, or even within religions themselves.

York police are also members of the hate crime/extremism investigative team, comprised of members of several Ontario police services, which gathers and shares hate crimes intelligence and analyzes how global events affect local communities, Insp. Veerappan said.

Policing York today is not the same as it was 25 or 30 years ago, he added.

"You need to be in tune with global events," he said.

If you have any questions or concerns, call the York Regional Police diversity and cultural resources bureau at 1-866-876-5423, ext. 6028. If you encounter an emergency, call 911.



SUN-TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

Coptic priest Tadros Tadros said this is the first time he has felt threatened during 20 years in Canada.

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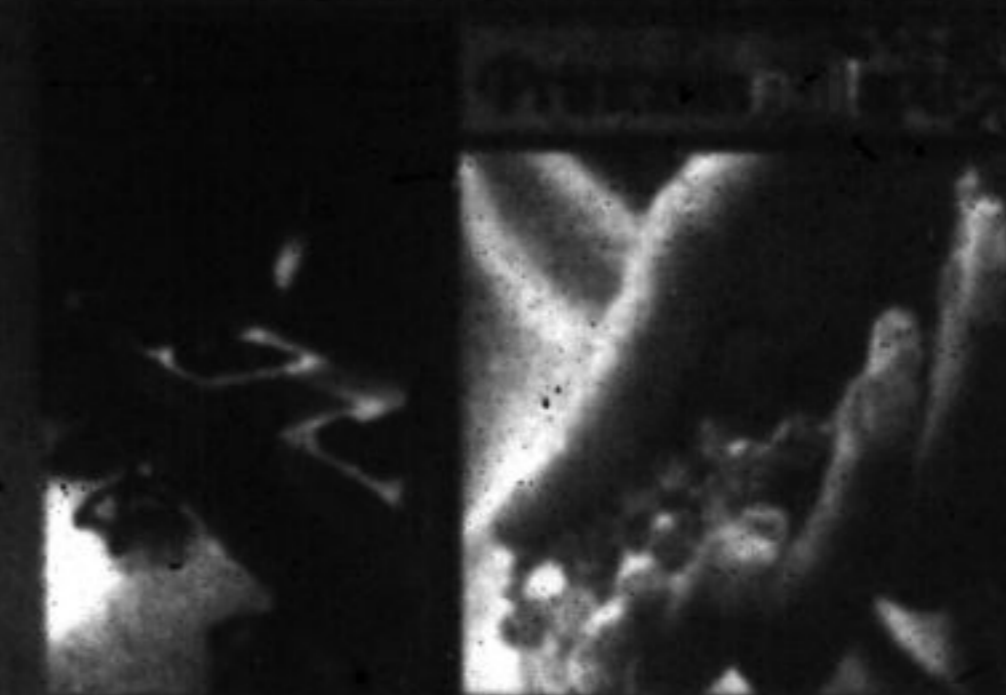
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