

Engage Muslim Brotherhood, Anwar tells US
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The United States should not fear engaging Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood as it is crucial to support people's choices in the Islamic world, Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim said.

Anwar, who has written extensively about democracy in Islamic societies, said on a visit to Washington that engaging Islamic-oriented groups has proven successful in Indonesia, Turkey and Malaysia.

Anwar said that Egypt presented a special "opportunity" due to the country's outsized influence across the Arab and Islamic worlds.

"Engagement works in meaningful ways. They will have to engage on every single issue," Anwar said late today at the New America Foundation think-tank.

While many Egyptians may disagree with the Muslim Brotherhood, the group represents a significant part of the population and "the only other option is to wage war against them," Anwar said.

"We can only succeed in Muslim societies if you are seen to be respectful of the choice made by Muslims, or Egyptians in this case," Anwar said.

Strict constitutional guarantees

He added that engagement must come only after strict constitutional guarantees for freedom of expression, freedom of religion, the rule of law and "economic justice."

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 and is Egypt's most powerful organized opposition, although it has taken a back seat in the mass demonstrations against strongman President Hosni Mubarak.

The future role of the Muslim Brotherhood is a heated topic of discussion in Washington, with some US policymakers uneasy about the movement's goals but others believing that it is comparatively moderate in ideology.

US President Barack Obama's spokesperson said on Monday that the White House had had no contact with the Muslim Brotherhood.

"We have many disagreements with the rhetoric of some of the leaders in that organization," spokesperson Robert Gibbs told reporters.

- AFP