

THE GOOD SHEPHERD...

A Report on Brutality Against Christian Clerics in Syria
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The Good Shepherd: A Report on Brutality against Christian Clerics in Syria

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INTRODUCTION

Jamil Elias Diarbakerli

Executive Director, Assyrian Monitor for Human Rights

Syrian Christians have strong historical and cultural ties with Syria as confirmed by documents and historical and contemporary events. They view it as the homeland of their parents and ancestors, and they look forward to a future for themselves there, despite all the tragedies that have befallen them, and are befalling them, from dictatorial regimes as well as from the forces of extremism, which are two sides of the same coin.

History and events are witness to their great contribution to the building of Syria's culture, which they have inherited and developed from generation to generation as the civilizations of Assyria, Babylon, and Aram. Syria (in the historically wider geographic sense) was the starting point for several Christian sects and Eastern churches and has been the home of many prophets, messengers, saints, and monks, who have gone forth to all parts of the world to spread the good news of Christianity, which holds a message of love and peace for all. There are also dozens of monasteries all over Syria, and hundreds of churches and holy sites that are important in Christian history and human civilization.

In the beginning of the 20th century, Syrian Christians constituted about 30 percent, nearly one third of the Syrian population. For most of the century, however, their numbers dropped. They emigrated for a variety of reasons, including political, economic, social, and religious, as well as a low birth rate compared to the majority of Islamic sects, so that today they number no more than half a million. By 2010, according to semiofficial statistics, Christians constituted a mere eight to ten percent of the total population of about 25 million people.

Christians played a significant role in building many of the cities, towns, and villages in Syria. They worked with many other communities, including the Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Turcoman, Circassians, Druze, Alawites, and the other components of Syrian society, to say nothing of their active role in drafting laws and constitutions and other public regulations.

Facts and data confirm their clear fingerprints on the creation of the economic renaissance experienced by the country since its establishment in agriculture, industry, and commerce. Christians still have a prominent share in the national experience, which has bestowed on them a national partnership in all stages in varying proportions. At times during the middle of the 20th

century they also participated in the founding of cities, towns, social associations, parties, and parliamentary and political life. We can refer to this period using the term "the golden age" of Syrian Christians, especially from the standpoint of politics. Many Christian personalities participated in the establishment of deeply rooted parties, such as the National Bloc and others. This was in addition to the role of the church, which at the time had three dimensions: national, spiritual, and social.

Despite all of these facts that reflect the Christian community's leading position in Syrian political and national life during the 1950s, it did not translate in terms of laws and constitutions, including being treated equally before the law. There remained many positions of responsibility that they were prohibited from holding, such as the country's presidency, the office of prime minister, and the key ministries. To the Christian community, the "prosperity and flourishing" of society was not fully experienced by the community, since they were not treated as a distinctive national component nationally and religiously, that required the preservation of its rights enshrined in the law. Despite this, however, the Christian community wove strong relationships with the Muslim majority in commerce, industry, and politics.

With the proclamation of the Arab Union between Syria and Egypt in 1959, the Christians in Syria began to endure new suffering. The years of the Syrian-Egyptian union can rightly be called "the disaster" that befell the Christians in Syria. The ascension of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser to power in the country constituted the start of problems for the Syrians in general, and Christians in particular. All the Christian schools, such as the Franciscan (Dar al-Salam), the American, and other schools that had a clear influence on Syrian society, were nationalized. The Union government started pursuing nationalization policies, such as attacking Christians who worked in important economic positions, since many of them were owners of factories, companies, and other economic entities, and they owned a large portion of land and agricultural organizations that were nationalized during the Union period. The disaster of the Union was then followed with the Ba'ath Party taking control of the country in 1963, which caused the Christians and many Syrians to pay the price of the police and security state that

was established by the Ba'ath Party. This caused many Christians to emigrate, seeking more secure, free, and stable homes, in countries governed by the rule of law. It is hard to neglect the impact of the policies of chauvinistic Arabism that were imposed on non-Arab Christians, including Chaldeans, Syriacs, Assyrians, and Armenians, who were forbidden to speak their language and were forbidden to display any signs of their culture.

With the taking of power by the Ba'ath Party during the decades that followed the ascent to power by the family of Hafez al-Assad in 1970, the Christians did not regain any of their rights that had been taken away (they were used as tools without being partners in the national decision-making, which was seized for the benefit of the al-Assad family and their retinue). The new regime in the country, which was established by force, was able to impose stability, which allowed the regime to strengthen its security, military, social standing, and economic position. As a result, the Christians were forced to give up their political role, just like the other components of Syrian society.

But the outbreak of popular protests in Syria reshuffled the cards in the Christian collective consciousness. On the one hand, the relative stability that revived their community was threatened, but on the other hand the fall of the regime that prohibited them from exercising their political and constitutional rights was not something that was of no consequence. The Syrian Christians were perched uncertainly between the two ends of this ambiguous duality, hesitant to respond to the question of the revolution, which turned into an ordeal and a dilemma that was difficult to deal with.

With this existential uncertainty, the Christians divided into three groups: One group stands wholeheartedly with the regime and with al-Assad to the end and hopes that the revolution and the opposition will be crushed, and that al-Assad will remain in power. This group is the majority in the Christian street. A second group supports the revolution openly and unambiguously and stands officially and openly with the Syrian opposition. It wants the armed opposition to be victorious in its war against the regime. This group is a minority. The overwhelming majority of Syrian Christians constitutes a third group that can be called metaphorically "the silent group."

It is not a group without an opinion, but rather, it has a clear opinion about the values of the Syrian revolution, democracy, freedom, justice, reform, civil society, and the end of corruption and repression. But

it is a "silent" group in the sense that it does not act for two reasons. First, its extreme fear of the regime's vengeance and brutal repression against it (as it has done with others) has forced it to remain quiet. Second, it is clearly, justifiably, and understandably displeased with the operational methodology of some factions of the opposition, which has met the regime head on in its choice of violence and has faced the regime's violence with equal violence, its sectarianism with equal sectarianism, and its terrorism with terrorism. This majority of Christians in Syria supports change and an end to the age of totalitarianism, repression, and dictatorship, but it does not believe that it can be achieved through violence, war, and hostilities. It also does not have confidence in the alternatives that the Syrian opposition can bring about.

The Syrian Christians have drunk from the same bitter cup that the Syrians have drunk from. They have traveled the same painful road that has been their country's destiny. They have offered thousands of victims and hundreds of them have been detained, abducted, and forcibly made to disappear¹, just like the other Syrian factions and sects. Their churches and monasteries have been destroyed, their shops, factories, homes, and lands have been plundered, and several Christian clerics have been persecuted during the current events in the country following the outbreak of popular protests demanding freedom and dignity and the removal of the regime of President Bashar al-Assad on March 15, 2011.

The pain of the Syrian Christians has exceeded the limit. Syrian cities and villages throughout the country have been abandoned by their Christian inhabitants, such as Raqqa, Deir El-Zor, Ras al-Ayn, Ma'loula, and the Assyrian villages of the Khabur Basin, leaving hundreds of thousands of displaced persons and emigres within Syria, in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, and elsewhere, not to mention the thousands who have reached the West seeking safety and stability. This is not only emptying Syria of this authentic component, but the entire Middle East, especially in the period that is witnessing accelerating transformations. This will lead to redrawing the map of the region and it will be without their historical presence, without the diversity and pluralism that the region has had for thousands of years.

Motala, April 22, 2018

¹ See the report of the Christian political detainees in Syria issued by the Assyrian Monitor for Human Rights and the Organization for Justice for Detainees in Syria issued on December 10, 2015.

Father Basilios Nassar al-Antaki

Priest of the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Hama



Father Basilios, whose name before he became a priest was Mazen Nassar, was born on January 1, 1982 in the town of Kafr Buhum (Kafrbu) in the Syrian governorate of Hama. He obtained his secondary school certificate in 1999. He enrolled at the

Saint John of Damascus Institute at the University of Balamand, graduating in 2004 with a bachelor's degree with distinction. He earned his master's degree in pastoral studies from the same institute. He was ordained as a priest at the altars of the Antiochian Orthodox Church on October 7, 2007. He founded the Saint Cosmas School for Church Music Education. On January 25, 2012 he was martyred in the city of Hama while performing his humanitarian pastoral duties.

Here we provide a brief account of how Father Basilios Nassar was martyred, as told by his companion in humanitarian work, Father Panteleimon al-Eissa ¹, a priest in the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Hama.

On Wednesday, January 25, 2012, at exactly 1:00 PM, Ms. Fadila came to the archdiocese and told us that a member of the parish had died of natural causes and was lying on the sidewalk in the Jarajima neighborhood in the Syrian city of Hama. Father Basilios was the one who received the news. He went to His Excellency Archbishop Elia Saliba² and told him of the matter, and asked his permission to allow him to go to pick up this person from the sidewalk. The archbishop at first refused because of concerns for the safety of Father Basilios. But Father Basilios insisted on the grounds of love and pastoral duty, and the archbishop allowed him to go. Father Basilios asked me to go with him, so we went, taking along another employee of the diocese to show us the way. The location of the deceased was a five-minute walk from the archdiocese. When we approached the spot, some people who were about 100 meters from us told us not to approach because there was gunfire. We told them that we were priests and proceed to get the deceased person. When we reached the deceased, and tried to lift him, bullets were fired at us from the west. We entered a house and Father Basilios asked the owner of the house where we were hiding about the home of the deceased. It was a short distance from where we

were. Father Basilios went out to look at the house. At that moment he was exposed to gunfire that entered from his right arm, penetrated his chest, and came to rest in his left arm. I rushed to his aid and I helped him get up and go towards a nearby short wall so that we could avoid any additional injury. We started praying together while bullets were flying at us violently, from where we did not know, until he died within less than half an hour. I remained exposed to the bullets until a neighbor was able to bring me to his house. After about an hour, the regular army entered the area and we were taken to the national hospital, but Father Basilios had died about an hour or so earlier.

After the incident the parties in the Syrian conflict began to trade accusations about who was responsible for the death of Father Basilios Nassar. The official Syrian news agency SANA reported that "an armed terrorist group assassinated Father Basilios Nassar, the priest of the town of Kafr Buhum in the Hama suburbs, when he was helping a wounded man in the al-Jarajima neighborhood of Hama." For their part, the local coordination committee associated with the Syrian opposition, an organization that monitors the development of events in the country, reported in a statement that the killing of Father Nassar occurred "during a military campaign against the city by the regime's forces."

But the truth will remain hidden until neutral international committees are formed to investigate these crimes and violations against Christian clerics who are performing their pastoral service and humanitarian work.

1 Refer to the Father Panteleimon al-Eissa's voice recording <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RsFwkizM8Bs>.

2 Archbishop of the city of Hama and its Greek Orthodox adherents and the direct spiritual superior of Father Basilios Nassar

Father Fadi Jamil al-Haddad

Priest of the Greek Orthodox Parish of Qatana



Father Fadi was born in the city of Qatana on February 9, 1969. He studied in the Qatana schools. After earning his secondary school certificate, he enrolled at the Saint John of Damascus Theological Institute of the University of Balamand in Lebanon,

where he graduated with a rating of “good” in 1994. He married Antoinette al-Daris, with whom he had three children.

On July 14, 1995, he was ordained as a priest to serve in the parish of Qatana, which is part of the patriarchal diocese of Damascus under His Excellency Archbishop Elias Kafouri.

On Thursday, October 25, 2012, Father Fadi al-Haddad was martyred by unidentified armed men when Father Fadi al-Haddad was doing humanitarian work trying to return a member of his parish, Dr. Shadi al-Khouri, who had been abducted in early October 2012. Father Fadi began negotiating with the abductors, who were demanding a large amount of money. During the negotiations with the abductors Father al-Haddad was able to reduce the amount of the ransom and set the site for delivery and receipt. On October 18, 2012, Father Fadi al-Haddad went out with the father-in-law of the abducted doctor to pay the ransom. He was kidnapped with his companion and the ransom money was stolen along with the car in which they were riding. Following this, the conditions of the kidnappers increased, and they began negotiating for the priest and his companion in addition to the doctor. The Catholic news agency *Fides* later reported that the ransom that had been demanded for the release of Father Fadi al-Haddad was 75 million Syrian pounds.

On the morning of Thursday, October 25, 2012, the body of Father Fadi al-Haddad, bearing evidence of indescribable torture and disfigurement, was discovered in the area of Drousha¹, a small town that is administratively part of the Qatana area in the governorate of Damascus suburbs. The body of Father Fadi al-Haddad was identified by Father Elias Al-Baba, the priest of the Greek Orthodox church of the town of Hinah. He carried it to the town’s clinic. The body

of Father Fadi al-Haddad was examined by the district attorney in Qatana and forensic pathologists in the presence of His Excellency Bishop Moussa al-Khouri² in a room attached to the Qatana church. After the examination, a detailed report on the examination of the body was written, from which we publish the final conclusions:

Medical data:

1. Upon inspection of the body described above, it conforms to the description.
2. It was added as clarification that the two wounds in the right occipital area from the left temporal area were the result of the action of a sharp implement.
3. Upon examination, there is a variable fracture of the right parietal bone near the median line of the head.
4. The hole in the left occipital area is the entry hole of a gunshot.
5. Cyanosis shows that it was formed violently on the nape of the neck.
6. Rigor mortis was extreme on the body’s joints.
7. Accordingly, the cause of death is attributed to brain injury resulting from a gunshot that penetrated the head.
8. The time of death is estimated at approximately 18 hours from the time the investigation into the cause of death was performed.

Inspection by the chief prosecutor in Qatana:

1. It is evident that wide material loss led to the loss of both eyeballs.
2. Material loss includes skin in the left temporal area as a result of a blow with a sharp object.
3. There is a cut wound of 5 centimeters in length on the right occipital area.
4. There is a hole of one centimeter in diameter on the left occipital area of the scalp.

Following the incident, an official source in the Syrian government confirmed to the Saudi newspaper *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* that “an armed group killed the priest Fadi Haddad after abducting him from the city of Qatana in the Damascus suburbs.” The government source noted that the priest Haddad had been working on national reconciliation.

¹ See the statement of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and the rest of the East issued on October 25, 2012

² The bishop of Darayya – Greek Orthodox patriarchal vicar

For his part, the spokesman for the Syrian National Opposition Council, which is headquartered in Istanbul, Turkey, Mr. George Sabra³, said that “several days ago, gangs of *shabiha* (al-Assad loyalists) and groups of mercenaries that support and protect the regime abducted Dr. Shadi al-Khouri from the city of Qatana. The gangs contacted his relatives and demanded a ransom for his release.” He added: “Relatives of the abducted doctor together with Father Fadi al-Haddad, a priest in the Greek Orthodox church, went to pay the ransom and free the hostage. But the abductors seized them as new hostages, and raised the amount of the ransom demanded. Yesterday morning (Thursday) the world was shocked by the news of the murder of

Father Fadi Haddad by the criminal gang of abductors.” Sabra called on the concerned authorities (referring to the Syrian government) “to open a responsible and transparent judicial investigation to find the perpetrators and bring them to justice.”

Meanwhile, the Antiochian Patriarch and the symbol of the Greek Orthodox orient, the highest spiritual authority followed by Priest Fadi Haddad, condemned the barbaric and savage incident that Father Fadi Haddad suffered while performing a noble humanitarian task, but the patriarchal statement did not indicate the party responsible for the priest’s assassination.

³ A Syrian Christian from the Syrian city of Qatana

Father Michel Qaysar Kayyal

Priest of the Armenian Catholic Diocese of Aleppo



Father Michel Qaysar Kayyal was born in the city of Aleppo in 1987. He studied at the Vatican. He was a specialist in ecclesiastical law and he worked in the Joint Catholic Ecclesiastical Court of Aleppo as a consultant judge. He was

ordained as a priest in the Armenian Catholic Diocese of Aleppo on October 2, 2011.

Father Kayyal worked with displaced persons since the outbreak of the crisis in Syria, especially in the field of humanitarian aid and assistance, without discrimination between Christians and Muslims.

On February 9, 2013 an unidentified armed group kidnapped Father Michel Kayyal while he was traveling from the city of Aleppo to the town of Mashta al-Helu in the Syrian governorate of Tartus.

A civilian bus carrying passengers from the city of Aleppo to the town of Mashta al-Helu in the Syrian governorate of Tartus was stopped by a barricade manned by an unidentified armed group near the ICARDA barricade (two kilometers north of the city of Saraqib) on the international road between Aleppo and Damascus.

The armed group ordered Father Michel Kayyal and Father Maher Ishaq Mahfouz, a priest of the Greek Orthodox church, both of whom were wearing their clerical garb, to get off the bus, and they took them to an unknown location. Meanwhile, the bus was carrying a third priest, but he was able to escape the abductors because he was not wearing his clerical garb at the time, so they were unable to identify him.

Informed sources have reported that the abductors were most likely members of an extremist Islamic faction opposed to the Syrian government. On the other hand, Father Espiridon Tannous, a priest of the Greek Orthodox church in Sweden, told observers of the Assyrian Monitor for Human Rights that the priests' abductors were speaking in the dialect of the Syrian coast, an area that embraces the regime of the Syrian government. Meanwhile, no one has declared their responsibility for the abduction of the two priests.

Half an hour after the abduction, the abductors contacted the brother of Priest Michel Kayyal demanding the sum of 15 million Syrian pounds and the release of 15 detainees held by the Syrian regime. The abductors later withdrew the demand for the release of the detainees. They cut off communications after the family agreed to pay the amount demanded.¹

Sources of the Assyrian Monitor for Human Rights later learned that there had been negotiations with the abductors. These negotiations were marked by positive initial steps that might have contributed to their release. On the day of the abduction on April 22, 2013, the Syriac Orthodox archbishop of the city of Aleppo, Mar Gregorios Yuhanna Ibrahim was promised that the two abducted priests would be received in an area under the control of extremist Islamic groups, but this promise was not kept. While Archbishop Ibrahim was returning to the city of Aleppo, his episcopal seat, he was dealing with an abduction² that to this day remains a mystery. Since that day, there has been no news about Priest Michel Kayyal and his colleague Father Mahfouz.

¹ See the article "Christians in the Syrian Chaos... From the Kidnapping of Priests to Emigration" by Ramiz Antaki.

² For more information about the incident, see page 24 of this report.

Father Maher (Ishaq) Mahfouz

Priest of the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Aleppo



The family of Father Ishaq Mahfouz is from the village of al-Kamiya in Wadi al-Nasara, but he lived and was educated in the city of Aleppo, where he worked diligently and persistently for the church in Aleppo, showing a desire to serve the church through the priesthood. He also worked as an employee of the Public Railway Company in Aleppo. The Triangle of Mercies, Archbishop Kirilas Dumat, the Greek Orthodox archbishop of Argentina, selected him to serve as a priest there. He was ordained by Archbishop Boulos Yaziji, the Greek Orthodox metropolitan of Aleppo in the city of Aleppo as a priest of the diocese of Argentina, to which he traveled and where he remained, serving for one year. He then returned to the city of Aleppo where he ended up at the Saint George's Patriarchal Monastery in Wadi al-Nasara in the Syrian governorate of Homs, where he served until his abduction. He was returning from Aleppo after a visit to his sick mother and his family.

On February 9, 2013 an unidentified armed group abducted Father Ishaq (Maher) Mahfouz while he was traveling from the city of Aleppo to the town of Mashta al-Helu, in the Syrian governorate of Tartus.

He was stopped by a barricade manned by an armed group near the ICARDA barricade (two kilometers north of the city of Saraqib) on the international road between Aleppo and Damascus. A civilian passenger bus was traveling from the city of Aleppo to the town of Mashta al-Helu in the Syrian governorate of Tartus. The armed group ordered Father Maher Ishaq Mahfouz and Father Michel Kayyal, a priest of the Armenian Catholic Diocese of Aleppo, both of whom were wearing their clerical garb, to get off the bus, and they were taken to an unknown location. Meanwhile, the bus was carrying a third priest, but he was able to escape the abductors because he was not wearing his clerical garb at the time, so they could identify his occupation.

Sources of the Assyrian Monitor for Human Rights later learned that there had been negotiations with the abductors. These negotiations had been marked by positive initial steps that might have contributed to the release of the two priests. On April 22, 2013, the Syriac Orthodox archbishop of the city of Aleppo, Mar Gregorios Yuhanna Ibrahim was promised that the two abducted priests would be delivered in areas controlled by Islamic opposition factions, but this promise was not fulfilled. While Archbishop Ibrahim was returning to the city of Aleppo, his episcopal seat, he was the victim of an abduction¹ that to this day is a great mystery. Since that date, there has been no news about Priest Maher Ishaq Mahfouz and his colleague Father Kayyal.

¹ For more information about the incident, see page 24 of this report.

Archbishop Mar Gregorios Yuhanna Ibrahim

Syriac Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo



He was born in the city of Qamishli in 1949. He enrolled at Mar Afram Theology School in Lebanon, where he studied theology and philosophy. He earned a master's degree in the history of the eastern churches and a bachelor's degree in

oriental ecclesiastical law from the University of Rome in 1976. He later became Patriarchal Vicar of Sweden and The Netherlands between 1976 and 1977. In 1978, he was appointed director of the Theology School in Aatchane, Lebanon. He was ordained as an archbishop of the Syriac Orthodox Diocese of Aleppo and its surroundings on March 4, 1979.

Between 1985 and 1987 he studied the pre-Islamic history of Christians in the countries of Mesopotamia for two school years at the University of Birmingham and Selly Oak College in England.

Archbishop Yuhanna Ibrahim represented the Syriac Orthodox Antiochian Church at international and local apostolic and ecumenical conferences. He had many ecumenical, humanitarian, and cultural activities, among the most important of which were membership in the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC), serving as an honorary member of the Pro Oriente Foundation, and serving as a consultant to the Peoples and Religions Committee in the Vatican. In addition, he founded and supervised Dar Mardin – al-Ruha Publishing House in Aleppo, which has published hundreds of books dealing with Syriac and Christian affairs and interreligious dialogue.

Archbishop Ibrahim called on Christians not to emigrate during the Syrian crisis. He held all the parties to the conflict in Syria responsible for the worsening situation in the country. He did this in his declarations and statements at several local and regional events, and he called on the parties to the conflict to reject violence, stop shedding the blood of the Syrian people, and create an appropriate formula for ending the Syrian war. Among his most well-known statements was his

recent statement to the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) ten days before his abduction, when he said that the Christians' ongoing presence in Syria is not linked to having the head of the regime, Bashar al-Assad, remain. In this statement, the Archbishop also called on the Syrian regime, through the BBC, to "open the doors to the media so they can convey a true picture of the tragedy that has befallen the Syrian people."

Archbishop Yuhanna Ibrahim and Archbishop Boulos Yaziji, the Greek Orthodox archbishop of Aleppo, were abducted by an unidentified party near Aleppo on April 22, 2013, while Archbishop Yuhanna Ibrahim was visiting the border area between Syria and Turkey – under the control of the armed Syrian opposition – in his attempts to free the abducted priests Michel Kayyal and Maher (Ishaq) Mahfouz.¹ His efforts failed that day because the abductors broke an appointment that had been made to deliver them. As for Archbishop Boulos Yaziji, the Greek Orthodox archbishop of Aleppo and Iskenderun, he had finished his pastoral visit to the parishes of his diocese in the Turkish section. He agreed with Archbishop Yuhanna Ibrahim to meet that day at the Bab al-Hawa border crossing to return together to Aleppo. Below is a narration of the events.²

Archbishop Ibrahim's car started out to return to Aleppo, with the two archbishops as passengers, accompanied by Fouad Elia³ (a friend of Archbishop Yuhanna Ibrahim). The car was being driven by Fathallah Kaboud (Archbishop Ibrahim's driver). The car routinely passed the Kfar Daël barricade (west of the city of Aleppo) manned by the armed opposition. After crossing it, the car carrying the two archbishops entered the area of TAMAS [the Syrian Civilian Coalition] between the scientific research enclosure and the buildings in the al-Rashidin suburbs (southwest of Aleppo), a no-man's-land. The car carrying the two archbishops was suddenly cut off by a 4-wheel drive vehicle that forced the driver to stop. Four armed men with Caucasian features immediately got out of the car. Three of them drew their weapons (which included hand grenades), and the fourth man pulled the driver Kaboud and threw him out of the car. At least one of the armed men spoke standard Arabic. A quick conversation ensued, and then one of the armed men pulled Fouad

1 Concerning the two abducted priests, see elsewhere in this report.

2 The following account is taken from the recorded testimony of Mr. Fouad Elia, who was a witness to the abduction. It is kept in the archives of the Assyrian Monitor for Human Rights.

3 Fouad Elia was born in 1943. He studied in the School of Liberal Arts, Department of History, at the University of Aleppo. He was active in the Syrian Democratic People's Party and he was the secretary general of the Damascus Declaration for Democratic Change in Syria. He currently lives in Canada.

Elia out of the car after threatening him with the hand grenades. He took over the driving, accompanied by two other armed men, while the two archbishops were in the back seat. The two cars took off and returned to the areas under the control of the armed Syrian opposition. The sole witness adds that during the time he was removed from the car, one of the armed men broke the window of the car's rear door where Archbishop Yuhanna Ibrahim was sitting.

After the driver, Fathallah Kaboud, was thrown from the car, he went towards the scientific research enclosure between the buildings of the al-Rashidin Association and he then saw a dead body shot in the head from the front. As for Fouad Elia, after less than half an hour he was able to board a passing microbus returning towards the barricade of the opposition. (At that time, the area was an entry way to the city of Aleppo from that direction. At the time of the abduction, there was a long line of vehicles in both directions, but one did not risk interfering). The armed men at the barricade assured

Mr. Fouad Elia that the car carrying the two archbishops had returned in their direction a little while earlier. The armed men in it had drawn their arms and threatened to blow up the car if they did not clear the way for them. So, the armed men manning the barricade cleared the way for the vehicle to pass. According to a statement of one of the men manning the barricade, as they were passing, Archbishop Yuhanna Ibrahim threw his ID cards and those of the other archbishop. There is still much speculation and many questions about their fate, the location of their abduction, and the perpetrators. That is because of the high level of professionalism and precision of the abductors reflected in the operation which has prevented any information leaks that might lead to the possibility of determining the identity of the abductors. This has opened the door wide to the trading back and forth of accusations between the Syrian regime's intelligence service, neighboring countries, local armed factions, and takfiri groups.

Archbishop Boulos Yaziji

Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo and Iskenderun



He was born in the city of Latakia in 1959. He studied theology at the University of Thessaloniki in Greece, where he remained until he completed his doctorate degree in 1992. He also studied Byzantine music and Byzantine iconographic art. He then

served as dean of the Theology School and head of the Sayyida Balamand Monastery from 1994 to 2001. In 2000, he was elected and ordained as an archbishop over the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Aleppo and Iskenderun.

Since taking on the pastoral duties in Aleppo, he was specifically interested in pastoral institutions. He established the al-Mashriq School and he founded the Sayyida Bishara Convent. He also encouraged the development of the parish and the gospel through modern means of communication, by setting up websites and internet broadcasting channels. Archbishop Boulos Yaziji had many ecumenical activities, the most important of which was representing the Antiochian Patriarchate and the rest of the orient on the official Theology Dialogue Committee between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church. He was a member of the Committee of Antiochian Assembly for Ecumenical Foreign Relations. Archbishop Yaziji was a prolific writer and he translated a number of religious books from English and Greek into Arabic. His Excellency also wrote dozens of articles on religion.

Archbishop Boulos Yaziji and Archbishop Yuhanna Ibrahim, the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo, were abducted by unidentified persons near the city of Aleppo on April 22, 2013 after His Excellency Archbishop Boulos Yaziji, the Greek Orthodox

Archbishop of Aleppo and Iskenderun, had finished a pastoral visit to the parishes of his diocese in the Turkish sector. He agreed to meet Archbishop Yuhanna Ibrahim that day at the Bab al-Hawa border crossing to return together to Aleppo.

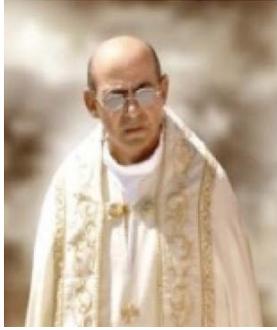
The car of Archbishop Yuhanna Ibrahim set out to return to Aleppo along with Archbishop Boulos Yaziji and Mr. Fouad Elia¹ (a friend of Archbishop Yuhanna Ibrahim). The car was being driven by Fathallah Kaboud, Archbishop Ibrahim's driver.

The car routinely passed the Kfar Da'el barricade (west of the city of Aleppo) manned by the armed opposition. After crossing it, the car carrying the two archbishops entered the area of TAMAS [the Syrian Civilian Coalition] between the scientific research enclosure and the buildings in the al-Rashidin suburbs (southwest of Aleppo), a no-man's-land. The car carrying the two archbishops was suddenly cut off by a 4-wheel drive vehicle that forced the driver to stop. Four armed men with Caucasian features immediately got out of the car. Three of them drew their weapons (which included hand grenades), and the fourth man pulled the driver Kaboud and threw him out of the car. At least one of the armed men spoke standard Arabic. A quick conversation ensued, and then one of the armed men pulled Fouad Elia out of the car after they threatened him with the hand grenades. He took over the driving, accompanied by two other armed men, while the two archbishops were in the back seat. The two cars took off and returned to the areas under the control of the armed Syrian opposition. From that moment, the car disappeared, and the archbishops disappeared. The opposition, the Syrian regime, and the international parties supporting them hurl accusations at each other about who is responsible for the abduction.

¹ Fouad Elia was born in 1943. He studied at the School of Liberal Arts / Department of History at the University of Aleppo. He was active in the Syrian Democratic People's Party and he was Secretary General of the Damascus Declaration for Democratic Change in Syria. He currently lives in Canada.

Franciscan Father Francois Murad

Head of the Saint Simeon Stylites Syriac Catholic Monastic Order



Father Francois Murad was born in the city of Aleppo in 1964. He was ordained as a priest in the Syriac Catholic Church on May 30, 1999. Father Murad was the head and founder of the Saint Simeon Stylites¹ Monastic Order, whose charter was confirmed by

Archbishop Mar Yaaqoub Bahnan Hando, the Syriac Catholic archbishop of al-Hasakah and Nusaybin. Father Murad took the Saint Simeon Stylites Monastery in the village of al-Ghassaniyah as his headquarters.

At dawn on Sunday, June 23, 2013 a group of armed men belonging to one of the extremist Islamic battalions attacked the Saint Simeon Stylites Monastery in the village of al-Ghassaniyah.² They killed its head, Father Francois Murad, plundered the contents of the monastery, broke what was left behind, and tore down crosses and church bells. Nuns from the village of al-Ghassaniyah reported that the body of Father Francois Murad had been hit by eight bullets.

The Christian satellite station Télé Lumière which broadcasts from Lebanon, subsequently published letters³ that were said to be by Father Murad to his spiritual head, Archbishop Bahnam Hando, the Syriac Catholic archbishop of al-Hasakah and Nusaybin, describing the difficult days the monk was experiencing.

The first letter was sent by Father Murad on December 18, 2012. In it, he tells of the danger of the situation, from the blockade of the Christians in the village, to the attacks on churches, to the abduction of parishioners. But the priest willingly showed that he was prepared to die and happily give his life for the sake of the Christians in Syria.

In the second letter, from February 25, 2013, Father Francois discusses the spiritual struggle, touching on the burning of a Greek church, the destruction of the Latin Shrine of the Virgin, and the destruction of the Saint Simeon Stylites Monastery where he resided, as well as the Protestant church.

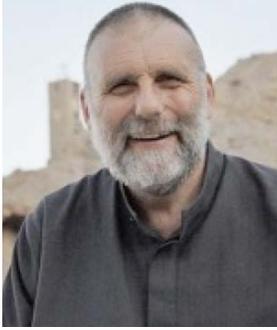
1 This is not the monastery and citadel of Saint Simeon Stylites north of Aleppo, Syria.

2 Al-Ghassaniyah is a Christian Syrian village near Jisr al-Shughur in the governorate of Idlib. It is situated 10 kilometers west of the city of Jisr al-Shughur on the road that connects Latakia and Jisr al-Shughur in Syria. In late 2012 it fell under the control of extremist Islamic battalions opposed to the Syrian regime.

3 Abouna website: Télé Lumière publishes three letters of the martyred Father Francois Murad.

Jesuit Father Paolo Dall'Oglio

Head of the Monastic Order and Monastery of Saint Moses the Abyssinian



Father Paolo Dall'Oglio was an Italian citizen who was born in the Italian capital of Rome in 1954. He began his clerical life in the Jesuit monastic order in 1975. He studied Arabic in the Lebanese capital of Beirut and specialized in Islamic

studies in Damascus.

In 1982, he discovered the Monastery of Saint Moses the Abyssinian in al-Nabek in Rif Damascus, whose construction dates back to the sixth century AD. In 1984, he was ordained as a priest at the Syriac Catholic Church and in 1986 he earned a master's degree in missiology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. In 1989, he earned a doctorate degree from the same university; his thesis was entitled, "On Hope in Islam."

In 1992, he founded the al-Khalil (an alternate Qur'anic and evangelical name of the Prophet Ibrahim) Community as an ecumenical and monastic community dedicated to Islamic-Christian dialogue. He took the Monastery of Saint Moses the Abyssinian to be the headquarters of this community. In 2009, he earned an honorary second doctorate from the Université Catholique de Louvain.

Father Paolo was expelled from Syria in 2012 by the Syrian government because of his declared support of the Syrian revolution, condemnation of the deeds of the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Father Paolo's demand for him to step down, and his association with members of the political opposition.

On July 21, 2013, Father Paolo was visiting the city of Raqqa after it was no longer under the control of the Syrian regime, hoping to meet the leaders of organizations and activists in the city to hold talks with them, and to help free two French journalists who had been abducted earlier. He was abducted, however, by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Local activists who had accompanied Father Paolo during his trip to the Syrian governorate of Raqqa confirmed that contact with him had been lost since noon on Monday, July 29, 2013 when he went to Raqqa to meet the *emir* (leader) of ISIS in Raqqa, Abu Saad al-Hadrami and his deputy, Abu Dujana, who served as the link between him and the emir of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Until today, there has been conflicting news about his fate. ISIS has made no official announcement about its responsibility for the abduction of Father Paolo, and there has been no information confirming that he is still alive.

Jesuit Father Frans van der Lugt

Head of the Monastery of the Jesuit monks in Homs



Father Frans van der Lugt, a Dutch citizen, was born in the city of The Hague in the Netherlands in 1938. He joined the Jesuit monastic order in 1959. His long monastic education was divided between the Netherlands, Lebanon, and France. He earned a doctorate in psychology and was ordained as a priest in 1971. Father Frans worked in Syria since 1966. He spent about 50 years in service to the Syrian people of various sects and denominations, traveling between Syrian cities giving lectures in his fields of expertise: spiritual, clerical, and psychological support. He also initiated projects in service to Syrian society, especially the youth, including the al-Masir Project which attracted both Christian and Muslim young men and women from various parts of Syria who travel together to hold dialogue sessions on topics of civilization and culture, in order to discover the beauty of Syria. Through this project, Father Frans was able to create a generation that loves its country, and he always encouraged these youths with the well-known slogan “onward.”

He also established the al-Ard Project, an agricultural project in the suburbs of Homs that is specifically concerned with those with special needs in the neighboring Christian and Islamic villages. It contains a center for dialogue between all factions and religions.

Father Frans continued to give during the Syrian crisis. After opposition fighters took control of nearby neighborhoods of Homs, Father Frans refused to leave, remaining in his monastery with his parishioners, besieged by the Syrian government army and its allied militias. He was the sole Christian cleric to remain in the area with about 20 Christians out of more than 85,000 before the outbreak of the conflict in mid-March 2011.

He was assassinated by an unknown person on the morning of Monday, April 7, 2014 in his monastery in the city of Homs.

Here we provide the testimony of one of the workers at the monastery about the assassination of Father van der Lugt:¹ An unidentified person came to the monastery in the morning and asked to meet with Father Frans to ask him some questions. When Father Frans appeared, his visitor said, “Peace to you.” Then the person said to him, “We want to take you someplace where you can be comfortable.” Father Frans answered him, “I’m absolutely not leaving the monastery” (referring to his monastery in old Homs). At that point, the person ordered him to sit down on a nearby chair. When Father Frans sat down, the person shot him. This incident was seen and heard by the worker in the monastery. The killer ordered him to sit down next to him and to keep quiet or else he would shoot him as well.

Meanwhile, other accounts reported that the killer had forcibly taken Father Frans out of the monastery and shot him. It should be noted that the official Syrian news agency SANA² published a report on the assassination of Father Frans as follows: “An armed terrorist group today assassinated Jesuit Father Frans van der Lugt.” It quoted a source in the governorate, claiming, “terrorists shot the priest at dawn, killing him instantly.”

¹ Broadcast by the Lebanese LBC satellite station

² Which speaks on behalf of the Syrian government in Damascus

Franciscan Father Hanna Jallouf

Priest of the Latin Parish in the village of al-Qunaya



Franciscan Father Hanna Mousa Jallouf, 65 years old, was the head of the Saint Joseph Monastery in the village of al-Qunaya (14 kilometers north of the city of Jisr al-Shughur) in the Idlib suburbs. He was in charge of the Latin sect in the Syrian governorate of

Idlib. Father Jallouf previously served in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, where he worked as the head of the Terra Sancta School in the capital, Amman, from 1992 to 2000. The Custody of the Holy Land, with its headquarters in the city of Jerusalem, is the spiritual authority responsible for Father Jallouf.

On October 5, 2014, the al-Nusra Front captured Franciscan Father Hanna Jallouf together with several men of the village shortly after they had protested the

seizure of control of the convent by al-Nusra Front combatants – whose elements controlled the village and its neighboring areas – and their seizure of the olive crops that belonged to the monastery. They were all taken to a place called the “Shari’a Court” of al-Nusra in the town of Darkush (in the district of Jisr al-Shughur). During the period of Father Jallouf’s captivity and that of the men of the village, elements of the terrorist al-Nusra Front raided the monastery and took official stamps and ownership documents for the monastery’s land and property.

Franciscan Father Hanna Jallouf was freed on October 9, 2014. The Council of Bishops of the East that was meeting in Rome condemned the abduction of Father Jallouf and several Christians with him, and it demanded their immediate release. They also called for an urgent international movement to stop the bloodshed and the targeting of clerics in the East.

Franciscan Father Diya' Aziz

Priest of the Latin Parish in the Village of Yakubiyah



Father Diya' Aziz, an Iraqi citizen, was born in the Iraqi city of Mosul in 1974. He obtained a diploma from the Medical Institute in Mosul. In 2002 he joined the Franciscan monastic order. Father Diya' served in monasteries of the Franciscan monastic order in Egypt for several years. In 2010, he returned to the Custody of the Holy Land and was sent to the Jordanian capital of Amman. He was later transferred to Latakia in Syria. He then offered himself in service to the Latin sect in the village of Yakubiyah, in the Syrian governorate of Idlib, which is currently under the control of the terrorist al-Nusra Front.¹ He was abducted by the al-Nusra Front on July 4, 2015, which freed him after six days. He was abducted a second time on the Latakia – Idlib road by an extremist group on December 23, 2015, and he was again released after two weeks.

Franciscan Father Diya' Aziz was the victim of two abductions within less than six months. The first of them

was when al-Nusra Front abducted Father Aziz from his residence in the Immaculate Conception Monastery in the Christian-majority village of Yakubiyah (a village in the area of Jisr al-Shughur in the Syrian governorate of Idlib in northwestern Syria) on Saturday, July 4, 2015.

Legal sources reported that “the emir of the al-Nusra Front in the region, an Egyptian national, demanded to have a consultation with Father Aziz on Saturday. Father Aziz went but has so far not returned.”² He was released on July 10, 2016 in good health.

The second incident took place on December 23, 2015 when Father Aziz was traveling on the road from the city of Latakia to his residence in the village of Yakubiyah to celebrate Christmas. He disappeared along with others who were with him in the taxi in that he was riding. There are indications that he was abducted by an unidentified armed group.³

On January 4, 2016, the Custody of the Holy Land,⁴ the Franciscan monastic order in Jerusalem, announced that Father Aziz is now free. In its statement, the Custody said that Father Diya' had been freed and that he was in good health. It did not publish any other details about the incident for personal reasons.

1 A Syrian extremist Islamic front opposed to the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, it includes among its ranks fighters of various nationalities.

2 According to the report of the director of the Syrian Monitor for Human Rights, Rami Abd al-Rahman.

3 See the statement of the Assyrian Monitor for Human Rights: The Disappearance of a Christian Cleric in Syria... with Indications that he was Abducted (December 28, 2015).

4 The spiritual authority to which Father Diya' Aziz belongs administratively; it is located in the city of Jerusalem.

Father Ibrahim Farah

Priest of the Greek Orthodox Parish in Idlib



Father Ibrahim Farah, the priest of the Greek Orthodox church of Idlib, was born in Idlib in 1958. After completing secondary school, he enrolled in the Intermediate Commercial Institute in Aleppo, from which he graduated in

1980. He then traveled to Lebanon to study at theology school for two years. After his graduation in 1982, he returned to the city of Idlib to serve in its church. In 1986, he was ordained as a priest to serve the Orthodox church in the city of Idlib.

In a statement it gave on March 31, 2015, the Assyrian Monitor for Human Rights announced that an extremist group, which it believed to be the al-Nusra Front, shortly after its takeover of the city of Idlib on the border with Turkey in northern Syria, had abducted Father Ibrahim Farah, a priest of the Greek Orthodox Church of the Virgin Mary. During this period, a video recording appeared that was published on social media sites from an unknown location. According to the video, he was well and in a safe location. Throughout the video, the Father seemed to be in a state of agitation, as though he was speaking under pressure.

He was released several days later after Syrian opposition individuals and groups intervened to negotiate with the Front that had abducted the sole Christian priest in the city. He is currently in Turkey.

Father Jack (Yaqoub) Murad

Head of the Syriac Catholic Monastery of Saint Elian in al-Qaryatayn



Father Yaqoub (Jack) Murad was born in the city of Aleppo. He is in the fourth decade of his life. He is the head of the Catholic monastery in Syria, which was reestablished in 1982 by the abducted Jesuit Father Paolo Dall'Oglio. He is a priest of the Syriac

Catholic diocese of Homs, Hama, and al-Nabek.

An armed group with ties to ISIS abducted Father Yaqoub (Jack) Murad, the head of the monastic order of the Monastery of Saint Moses the Abyssinian, and the head of the Monastery of Saint Elian in the city of al-Qaryatayn, from his residence at the Monastery of Saint Elian on May 21, 2015, and took him and his companions to an unknown location after tying him up.

The abductors left them in the mountains near the city for four days. Then they were taken to the city of Raqqa, which the terrorist organization had adopted as its headquarters in Syria. During this time, Father Jack was subjected to psychological pressure by elements of ISIS.

After the terrorist organization took control of the city of al-Qaryatayn on August 5, 2015 and abducted 100 Christian families from the town, Father Jack was taken

from Raqqa to the nearby area of Palmyra. He was then placed in the same location that housed other Christian prisoners from al-Qaryatayn. While with them, Father Jack tried to comfort and pray with the families and encouraged them to bear the difficulties. He was interrogated several times by his abductors.

In early September, Father Jack Murad was summoned to a meeting of senior leaders from ISIS. They told him that the leader of the terrorist organization, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, had graciously allowed them to remain and to live in the territory of the State, and all the abductees signed the text of the dhimmi (People of the Book) contract, which allowed the Christians of the town to remain there. The most significant of these terms was payment of the annual poll tax of four gold dinars, not spreading their religion or their beliefs, and not possessing arms or cooperating with spies against ISIS. They were also prohibited from building monasteries, churches, or places of worship.

Father Jack Murad was later able to return to the city of al-Qaryatayn, where he saw the destruction of the Monastery of Saint Elian of which he was the head. After months of his captivity, he decided to escape from the city with a Muslim friend on a motorcycle. He now serves in the Syriac Catholic Archdiocese of Homs, Hama, and al-Nabek.

Father Antoine Boutros

Priest of the Melkite Catholic Parish of Shahba



Father Antoine Boutros, in the fifth decade of his life, is a priest of the parish of Saint Philip in the city of Shahba (As-Suwayda governorate in southern Syria), of the Greek Melkite Catholic denomination.

Father Boutros is known all over the region for his charitable and humanitarian activities and his role in preserving civil peace in As-Suwayda governorate.

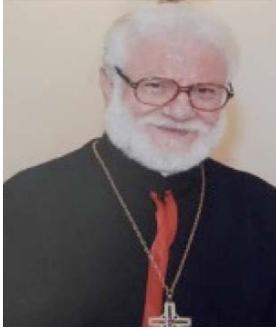
He was abducted on July 12, 2015 while returning to his residence in the city of Shahba from the village of Samma al-Hneidat, where he had celebrated Sunday mass.

In a statement on July 14, 2015, the Assyrian Monitor for Human Rights announced that contact with Father Antoine Boutros and his driver, Sa'oud al-Abdoun, had been since midday on Sunday, July 12, 2015 on the road between the city of Shahba and the village of Samma Al Hneidat, where he was headed to hold Sunday mass. There was a strong possibility that he had been abducted by unidentified persons.

After an armed group confirmed that it had abducted Father Boutros and his companion, negotiations between clerics and community leaders from Jabal al-Arab and the Hauran Plateau quickly commenced, in cooperation with the Greek Catholic Archdiocese of Khabab. The negotiations were crowned with success in the release of Father Antoine Boutros on Saturday, August 15, 2015 after 34 days of captivity.

Monsignor Michel Nu'man

Priest of the Syriac Catholic Diocese of Homs, Hama, and al-Nabek



Monsignor (Bishop's representative) Michel Nu'man, a priest of the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in the city of Homs, is a priest of the Syriac Catholic Diocese of Homs, Hama, and al-Nabek. He is a member of the People's

Committee for National Reconciliation, and he enjoys the love and esteem of all the people of Homs, both Muslim and Christian, due to

his humanitarian positions and services, especially during the Syrian crisis.

As told by Father Nu'man to a Syrian website, he headed out by car from Homs in early December 2013 with a friend towards the Palmyra desert based on a promise to free a captive and return him to his family. He indicated that his task was not crowned with success and he was unable to free the captive. But he was suddenly taken captive for more than six hours, during which time he suffered from fear, bitter cold, anxiety, and hunger. He and his companion were later freed and returned safely to Homs.

Father Razouq Hanoush

Priest of the Syriac Catholic Diocese of Aleppo



Father Razouq Hanoush was born in the city of Aleppo on September 14, 1959. He studied philosophy and theology at the Pontifical University of the Holy Spirit of Kaslik, Lebanon. He was ordained as a priest in the Syriac Catholic Diocese of Aleppo

in 1984, where he continues to serve to this day.

On May 20, 2013, he was attacked, beaten, and seriously injured in the eye by elements of the National Defense Forces¹ while trying to settle a dispute between them and a taxi driver in Aleppo.

¹ A group of “mercenary” civilians who do not have any official capacity and whose task is to help the security and military agencies of the Syrian regime in the acts of repression of their opponents committed by these agencies. These committees have spread widely in the areas located under the control of the Syrian government. These committees have a bad reputation among all the Syrian people because of the acts of abduction, theft, and extortion they commit against the people.

Father George Semaan Deeb

Priest of the Greek Orthodox Parish in the Town of Safita



Father George Semaan Deeb is the priest of the Saints Cosmas and Damian Parish of the Greek Orthodox sect in the Syrian town of Safita.¹ He is 42 years old.

Father Deeb received a violent beating from the

Syrian government affiliated militias, the National Defense Forces, on March 17, 2015. Following that, a cleric named Yusuf was brought to Safita Central Hospital for treatment after being injured in an attack during which he was beaten, causing injuries to his spine, abdomen, and head.

¹ See the statement of the Assyrian Monitor for Human Rights: Christian Cleric violently beaten in the Syrian city of Safita (March 18, 2015).

Father a-Rabban Boutros Qissis

Patriarchal Vicar of the Syriac Orthodox Diocese of Aleppo



Father al-Rabban Boutros Qissis, the Patriarchal Vicar of the Syriac Orthodox Diocese of Aleppo and its surroundings, is the head of the Saint Antonius Monastery in the Syrian village of Sadad in the Homs suburbs.

Father Boutros was injured after being shot in the car in which he was riding from Homs to Aleppo on Khanasir Road that links the two cities on November 6, 2016.

Observers of the Assyrian Monitor reported that al-Rabban Boutros heads the Syriac Orthodox Parish of Aleppo on behalf of its archbishop, Yuhanna Ibrahim, who was abducted five years before this. Thankfully, he only suffered from moderate injuries that were not serious.

The Nuns of Patriarchal Convent of Saint Tecla

A Greek Orthodox Sect in the Town of Ma'loula



The Convent of Saint Tecla is located in the town of Ma'loula outside of Damascus. The convent contains the remains of Saint Tecla, the daughter of a Seleucid king and a disciple of Saint Paul. It also contains water that is considered holy by

Christians, who seek a blessing from it.

The Convent of Saint Tecla belongs directly to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate¹ in Damascus. It is under the supervision of a mother superior, Mother Pelagia Sayyaf, and it is inhabited by 13 nuns who constitute an Orthodox convent, as is the case in other Orthodox monasteries throughout the world. The Convent of Saint Tecla is a holy shrine visited by many of the inhabitants of al-Qalamoun and Christians who come from countries in the East and the West. The nuns also have the task of welcoming visitors and accompanying them in their tour of the convent. The convent also organizes pastoral activities on an ongoing basis. The nuns work together to clean and maintain the convent's buildings.

In addition to these duties, the nuns engage in some manual tasks, such as sewing, embroidery, making rosaries, and inlaying icons with pearls. Since the appointment of Pelagia Sayyaf as head of the convent, a small orphanage has been established which today has several children. The nuns do not leave the convent except to supervise agricultural work in the nearby fields or sometimes to travel to Damascus to buy necessities that are not available in Ma'loula.

The thirteen nuns, including Mother Superior Pelagia Sayyaf, as well as three employees of the convent, were detained in early December 2013 when the terrorist al-Nusra Front² and other groups attacked the town of Ma'loula, 55 kilometers north of Damascus. A video recording was later broadcast on the internet showing armed men about to remove the nuns from Ma'loula because of the bombardment that was being launched by the regular Syrian forces against parts of the town. Elements of the al-Nusra Front appeared in the recording saying that the nuns were removed to ensure their safety, and the nuns in turn referred to the bombardment that befell the town.

In a recording broadcast by *al Jazeera* satellite station in December 2013 shortly after the detention, some of the nuns confirmed that they had left Ma'loula because of the bombardment. They called for an end to the targeting of Islamic and Christian houses of worship. One of them said that they had been taken to a beautiful villa at an undisclosed location. But according to reports, it was probably the city of Yabroud, which is also located in the area of al-Qalamoun.

The issue of protecting the nuns from the bombardment later turned into the process of their detention and the demand by the abductors of a ransom for their release. Shuttle talks then began between the Syrian capital of Damascus, the Qatari capital of Doha, and the Lebanese capital of Beirut by representatives of the State of Qatar and the Lebanese Director General of General Security, Major General Abbas Ibrahim.

The process to free the nuns began on March 10, 2014 at the Masnaa border crossing on the Syrian-Lebanese border following the success of the Lebanese-Qatari mediation. A video recording showed the detained nuns in a convoy of vehicles belonging to the al-Nusra Front and the exchange of 148 female Syrian prisoners by the Syrian authorities, including the wife of the leader of ISIS and her two children, in exchange for the nuns release.

¹ The current head of the church is Patriarch Yuhanna X Yaziji who officially assumed his duties on February 10, 2013.

² A branch of the terrorist al-Qa'eda organization. On July 28, 2016 it severed its connection with the organization and became known as "the Front for the Conquest of Syria" (Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham).

CONCLUSION

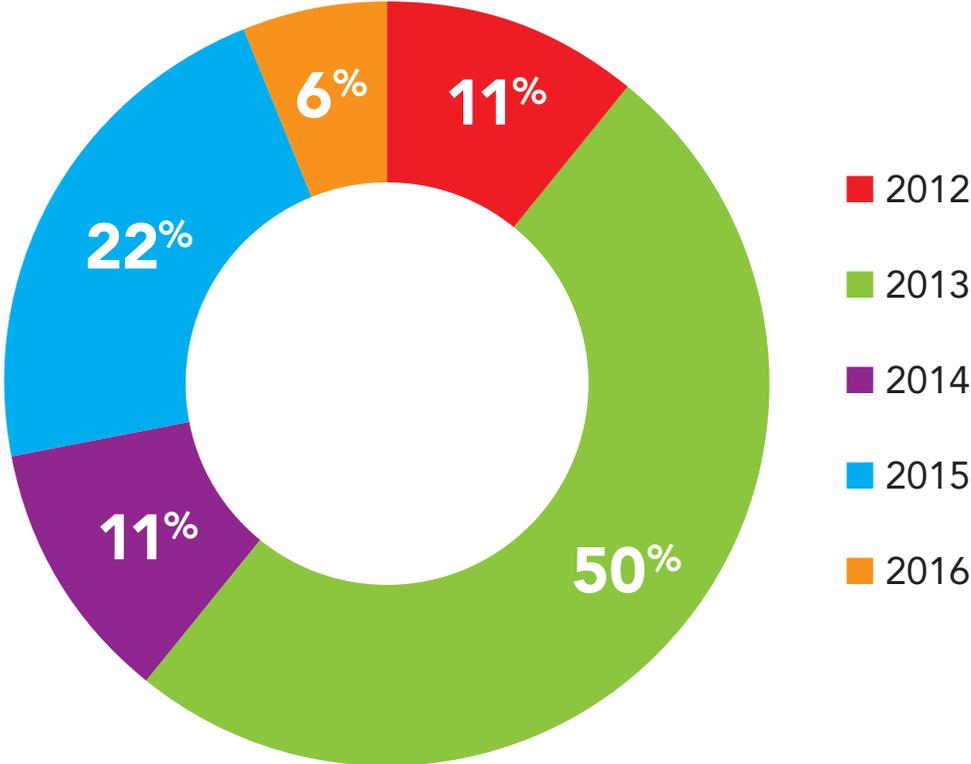
The Good Shepherd: A Report on Brutality against Christian Clerics in Syria is only one humble effort to describe the suffering of Christians in Syria, who over the course of six years have sacrificed many innocent victims during this conflict today. In this report, most of the crimes and acts of brutality against Christian clerics were committed by unidentified persons. We want to shed light on these crimes against Christians, that target their historical presence in the region. These persecutions and acts of brutality against the people mentioned in the report are only a small example of what the Christians in Syria are suffering. This report means to bring the attention of the international community and to bring an end to the chaos happening in Syria, and to protect the victims of genocide, and to preserve what is left of these historic communities before it is too late.

APPENDIX 1

Name	Denomination	Type of Crime	Year
Father Baslios Nassar	Greek Orthodox	Murder	2012
Father Fadi Haddad	Greek Orthodox	Abduction and Murder	2012
Father Michel Kayyal	Armenian Catholic	Abduction	2013
Father Maher Mahfouz	Greek Orthodox	Abduction	2013
Archbishop Yuhanna Ibrahim	Syriac Orthodox	Abduction	2013
Archbishop Boulos Yaziji	Greek Orthodox	Abduction	2013
Father Francois Murad	Syriac Catholic	Murder	2013
Father Paolo Dall'Oglio	Jesuit Monk	Abduction	2013
Monsignor Michel Nu'man	Syriac Catholic	Abduction	2013
Father Razouq Hanoush	Syriac Catholic	Beating	2013
The Nuns of Saint Tecla Convent	Greek Orthodox	Abduction	2013
Father Frans van der Lugt	Jesuit Monk	Murder	2014
Father Hanna Jallouf	Franciscan Monk	Abduction	2014
Father Diya' Aziz	Franciscan Monk	Abduction	2015
Father Ibrahim Farah	Greek Orthodox	Abduction	2015
Father Antoine Boutros	Greek Catholic	Abduction	2015
Father George Semaan Deeb	Greek Orthodox	Beating	2015
Father Boutros Qassis	Syriac Orthodox	Injury by Gunshot	2016

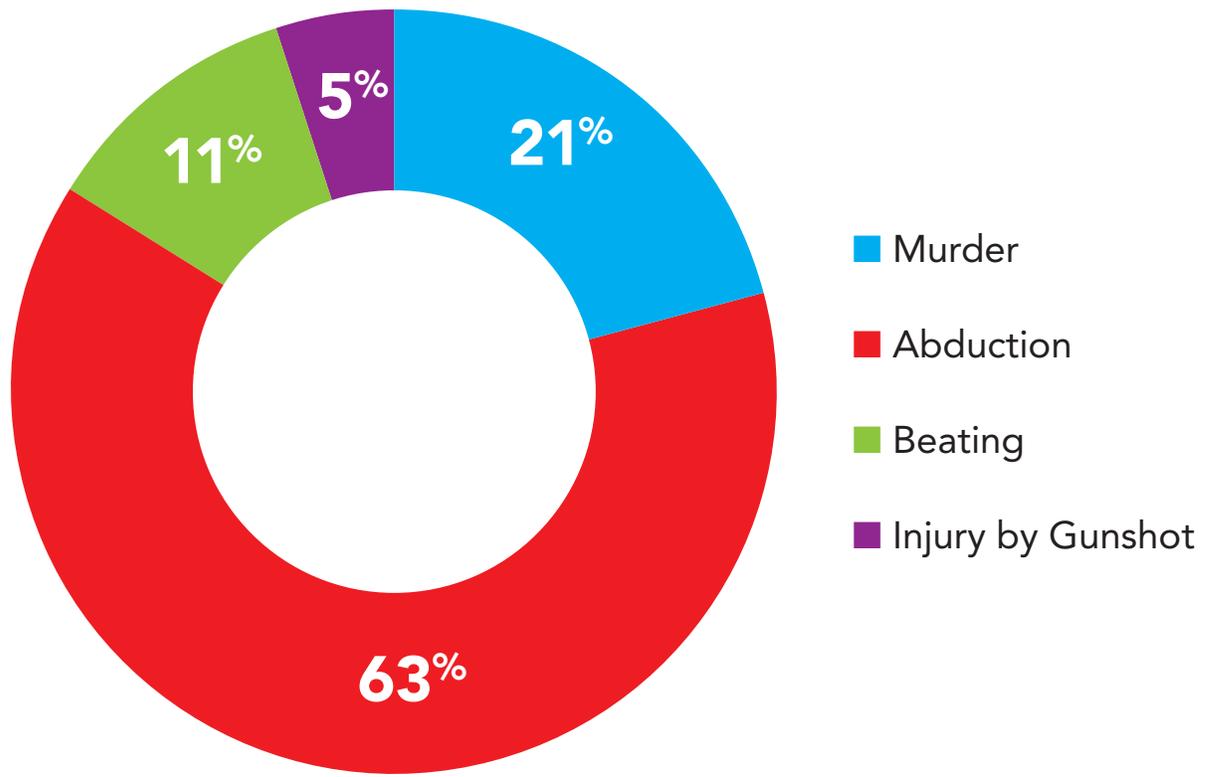
APPENDIX 2

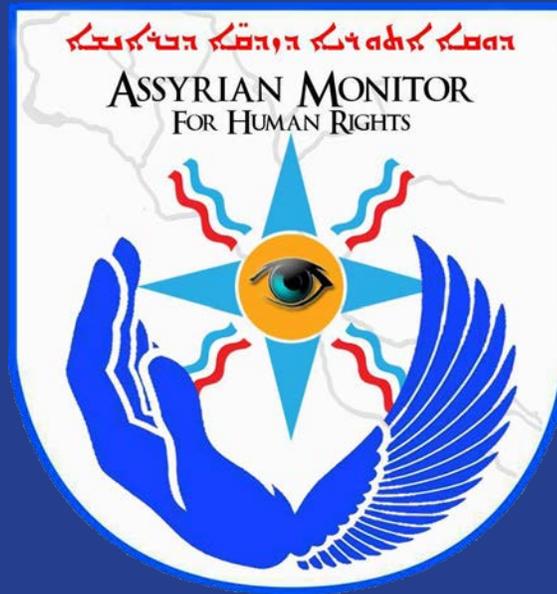
Distribution of crimes over the years included in the report



APPENDIX 3

Distribution of types of crimes against the people in the report





The Good Shepherd: A Report on Brutality against Christian Clerics in Syria

Prepared by: Assyrian Monitor for Human Rights

Introduction: Jamil Elias Diarbakerli, Executive Director of the Assyrian Monitor for Human Rights

Cover Photo : Adam Odisho

Monitor for Human Rights

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