

Dear friends,

How are things developing in Syria? This question is raised in every phone call and in every encounter. What is the situation of Christians in Syria after the Islamists, who were previously branded as terrorists by the West, toppled Assad and his terribly corrupt political regime and took over political power about two and a half weeks ago?

I find it hard to describe what is happening in Syria. Until now, I still think that all of this is only dream. What I am experiencing can hardly be real. The regime was overthrown within a few days by a rag-tag bunch of armed people. During all the years we had been afraid that the Islamists would seize power, because we know that for Islamists a peaceful co-existence is not possibly for Christian. Now their leaders are coming forward and engage in talks with our spiritual leaders. The Syrian army was disbanded within a few days by order of the military authorities, as was the police. Israel is bombing the entire arsenal of Syria, all missiles, warplanes, shipping fleets, weapons industries, etc. for fear that they will fall into the hands of the new “terrorist regime”!!! All of Syria's prisons are now empty. Words cannot describe what has been found inside. Only pictures can give a vague idea: Horrible pictures and videos.

On a political level, many events are happening every day. Many political delegations from around the world are visiting the leader of the revolution: Turkey with Qatar, France, Great Britain, USA, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, etc. The reception of the Turkish foreign minister was striking: a firm embrace, long talks, a visit to the city of Damascus. This indicates that Turkey is now the “ruler” in Syria, no longer the Iranians and the Russians. Whether the new ruler is actually Turkey remains to be seen. If that is the case, we must expect unrest.

For Christians, life is almost back to normal at the moment. Some think that things have improved compared to the past. Others – and this is the majority – view the developments in the country with skepticism. Most Christians are worried, although the spiritual leaders are constantly trying to provide reassurance, the way the new government is asking them to do. But the people see no guarantee of peace. They are still worried.

Now and again, attacks against Christians are carried out by Islamists in broad daylight. The Christian leaders keep saying: “These are isolated cases!”. Here is an incident that happened only two days ago in Skailabieh (Hama area): A Christmas tree was ceremoniously set up in the center of the Christian village. The next day, i.e. yesterday, the tree was set on fire by an Islamist extremist. When being asked for the reason, he said it was shirk (polytheism). The video went viral on social media. Last night there were big demonstrations in Damascus by Christians carrying crosses



and shouting: "Lift up your cross and don't be afraid!" or "How beautiful is death on the wood of our cross!" and other slogans.

The Christians are not afraid. But they do not know what fate awaits them.

As a priest and also as a Syrian, my advice is: We Christians need not be afraid as long as we believe in Christ. He is our real savior and protector. But under no circumstances should we remain inactive. If we hope for good things, then we should do our very best to turn this hope into action. This turbulent time invites us to show the true light of Christ.

The Christians in Syria are looking for this light. Let us give them this light, this hope for a new Syria that recognizes Jesus more clearly. The Christians have much to do. With God's help, they can perform miracles. That is my conviction, experience and, in any case, my deepest hope.

In this hope, I would like to wish you all a blessed Christmas, full of joy, grace and contentment, with much hope for better times in the New Year 2025.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Hanna Ghoneim

*Christmas 2024*

