

Dear friends and supporters,

First of all, I would like to send to all of you my best wishes for a good year 2025. I hope you have enjoyed a good and healthy start into this new year. Right at the beginning of the year, I should like to thank you for your great support throughout the past year. Your charitable help rendered it possible to show the power of God in times of need. Your loving and energetic support over the past year allows us, the foundation *Korbgemeinschaft*, to look to the future with hope and confidence. On behalf of *Korbgemeinschaft* and of all Syrians, I would like to convey to you a heartfelt thank you.

The current situation in Syria

A major and surprising change took place in Syria towards the end of last year. A political regime was overthrown and an Islamist leadership presents itself as the new form of government. Many friends ask me how I assess the situation, whether the developments observed since the change on December 8 are suggesting improvements and what the new situation is like for Christians.

The news that I keep getting from many friends in Syria doesn't sound too rosy. I am constantly receiving phone calls, videos and audio messages from Syria that show that the situation has become rather unstable. In many areas, the reports from pro-revolution media are not reflecting the realities that can be felt in the country. There is a general distrust among Christians towards the new leadership. People are deeply worried about the future of their country. They feel unsettled by the numerous Islamist groups, who have little respect and



understanding for the guidelines and objectives of the country's new leadership. These groups, which were once called the "Free Syrian Army", are committing many criminal acts and are dominated by feelings of hatred and revenge. There are also foreign fighters amongst them. They walk around in military uniforms and with rifles on their backs, they are wearing masks and are riding on motorcycles or in mud-smeared cars and harass and threaten the civilian population. They rob and plunder in the name of the revolution and if they know that someone served in the old regime's military, they kidnap this person and demand unbelievable, unaffordable sums of ransom money. There are also repeated cases of latent persecution of Christians, which never happened in Syria in earlier times. These cases are dismissed as "isolated acts" of men with an unrestrained character. Their background is neither known nor is it investigated in detail. They might very well intend to deliberately drive a wedge into society. The humanitarian situation after the revolution has become many times worse than it had been before.

The generally expressed wish among Christians at the moment is to leave the country as soon as possible until the situation stabilizes. But the question is: where should they go? No passports are currently being issued. Any access to embassies is blocked. The only option is to flee to somewhat safer areas. However, rents are very high there. People have no work and therefore no regular income. They are trying to survive somehow, under the most difficult conditions: No electricity, everything is very expensive, it is bitterly cold. There are no jobs, and private businesses are understandably also doing badly in this situation. Former employees in the military, the secret service and the Baath Party have not received any salaries for two months. Their cases will be reviewed one by one.



At the moment, Syria is without an army, without a court, without a police force. If a crime is committed, you can expect no help nor any protection. The infrastructure has been destroyed. The authorities are only working provisionally, without paying salaries to state employees, as the state has no income. There were many promises at the beginning, but so far nothing concrete has materialized. There is steadily increasing skepticism as to whether the new leadership will manage to get the country back on its feet in the near future. Hunger is spreading ever more widely and could very soon lead to catastrophic mass famine. There is now a lot of hatred and revenge everywhere instead of efforts towards reconciliation. The skepticism stems mainly from the fact that the HTS leader, Ahmad Alshara (formerly Abu Muhamma Alsholani), seems to have changed radically and that he is trying to adapt to the necessities of politics and diplomacy in the spirit of a new pragmatism. His former followers, however, who supported him, want the establishment of an Islamic state, which they have long been fighting for. In other words, we do not know whether Alshara will be able to reconcile all the controversies and the contradictory modes of thinking, as well as the diversity of all religious and confessional groups. In other words, we do not know whether he will be able to assert himself as the guiding figure of the new Syria and to lead the country successfully.

Perspectives and optimism despite everything

A question that I am often asked is “Should the Christians leave the country?” It is expected that an aid plan (similar to the Marshall Plan for Europe in the middle of the last century) will be installed, most likely from the part of Saudi Arabia. Reconstruction will hopefully begin soon. Many Turkish and Qatari construction companies are already preparing for this. Unfortunately, each state seems to be primarily pursuing its very own interests in this process. Christians must therefore remain vigilant and be prepared to be faced by further challenges in the near future.

Leaders of all churches are calling on Christians, especially the young ones, to remain in the country in order to strengthen and make visible the presence of Christian faith and of Christian work in the country.

The Christians in Syria urgently need our help in order to persevere in this precarious situation. It is not just a matter of sheer survival, but also very much about fulfilling an important mission in these very trying times. For us, reconstruction has already begun. We should not be afraid of the future, but we ought to start today to build a good future in the spirit of God and Jesus Christ. Young people need prospects for the future. It is “inaction” that is wearing down their courage and confidence. There is a lot of work for them to do in terms of salvation and positive development of the country. Thanks to the help of friends and supporters, *Korbgemeinschaft* is sending them humanitarian goods and social support money for food, medicine, fuel and rental subsidies. In my opinion, the time is ripe and favorable now for implementing many projects. We are currently expanding the social market (SOMA) in Maarouneh to the size that had originally been planned. The Church can now show the glory of God!



Expansion of SOMA in Maarouneh

Many dear friends who care about Syria keep asking me how the situation has developed since the initial euphoria after the fall of the regime, and whether people are still optimistic and confident.

The people on the ground are faced with and have to cope with new, very difficult circumstances and the must somehow manage in these unstable and uncertain times. I myself have not lost my optimism. Quite the opposite – my hope has even

grown stronger by the grace of God. I am still convinced that the grievances could become a great opportunity for Christians to “assert themselves”. What depresses me at times is the lethargy of certain authorities in the Church, both in Syria and here in the West. While the prevailing attitude of the Church in Syria is “wait and see”, I often observe an attitude of just “watching” in the Church here in the West. Neither of these approaches is of the slightest benefit to the Christians in Syria. To put it more directly, I would even describe these two hesitant attitudes as counterproductive.

What my personal optimism is based on is, first of all, the firm belief that God works strongly in times of need. When I look at the “good people” in Syria who are ready and happy to do something to rebuild the country and to restrengthen society, and at the same time at the many charitable people here in Europe who are willing to actively help (the majority of them are charitable women), then this knowledge strengthens my confidence.



Food packages for the poor

In order to further reinforce this optimism, my great wish is that the big aid organizations will get involved and that they loosen their sometimes overly cautious attitude. Syria is a devastated country today. There is a lot of work to be done. The good works are not being



Turkish channel interviewing the head of the Korbgemeinschaft-team in Aleppo

obstructed by the new rulers. They are even viewed with admiration. The Islamists at least mention the name of God. If we do something that pleases God, namely helping the poor, renovating or building schools, hospitals, social institutions, old people's homes, etc., in other words, if we are active in areas of society where Christians have always been seen as model citizens – then we as Christians will be able to hold our own.

Korbgemeinschaft is now even considering to take over a prison building in order to convert it into a school. We shall see if this idea will be feasible. My idea in this case is analogous to the motto “turning swords into plowshares”. To transform evil, which is geared towards killing, subjugating and exploiting fellow human beings, into something good. A solid education – education of the heart and of a person’s character, but also school and academic education – is one of the most important contributions towards a peaceful, democratic society that aims for positive coexistence and the well-being of all.

Those who show the true culture of Syria, who love their home country and do not abandon it, those who stand up for values, justice, peace and the well-being of the people, trusting in God, all those can overcome fear and defeat the power of evil.

With your active support, we as *Korbgemeinschaft* are enabled to achieve many positive things in Syria. I should like to convey to you a heartfelt thank you for all your support – be it material or non-material, in the form of voluntary help, prayer or advocacy.

In deep gratitude and united with you in prayer,

Your Fr. Hanna Ghoneim



Water supply for Maarouneh

January 14, 2025