



ASIA/SYRIA - Christians being targeted by armed Islamist gangs

Damascus (Agenzia Fides) - Armed Islamist gangs, that pollute the Syrian Liberation Army, have targeted some believers in the ongoing conflict in Syria: is what several sources say to Fides in the Christian community in Syria, of various denominations. Despite the assurances by the Revolutionary Council of Homs and the Syrian National Council on the fact that "there is not an ongoing denominational war against Christians", Fides learns about alarming stories and testimonies that show how the Islamist, Salafis and Wahhabis groups, seek to seize or manipulate the Syrian opposition.

Some Christian families confirm to Fides that they were evicted from Homs because "considered close to the regime". Over 10 thousand Christians have fled from the town of Kusayr, on the border with Lebanon, following pressure from Sunni Islamist groups, a local priest told Fides. According to Fides sources, after the first few months of fighting, the army of the opposition "have been joined by the Islamist armed gangs, mercenaries, Lebanese Sunni militants".

Christians who do not want to join the popular uprising are increasingly marginalized and then "considered enemies" of the revolution. Not only: the Islamist gangs have been driven out from the district of Hamidiya in Homs some Christians who declared themselves in favor of the opposition, even present within the local coordination of opposition groups. As a source tells Fides, the militants broke into their house and told them: "All your assets are to be for Islam; go away, otherwise we will kill you".

Meanwhile, many homes, roads, buildings in the Christian district of Homs are currently littered with mines and explosives, to prevent a possible Syrian regular army advance. Last week a representative of the Syrian Catholic community tried to meet with members of the Syrian army of liberation to ask to save a historic and cultural heritage (historic buildings and places of worship) which shows the traces of centuries of the Christian faith in the city. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 30/3/2012)