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ASIA/SYRIA - Ultimatum to Christians: "Leave Qusayr"

Qusayr (Agenzia Fides) - Exodus of Christians in the west of Syria: the Christian population has left the town of Qusayr, near Homs, following an ultimatum from the military chief of the armed opposition, Abdel Salam Harba. This is what local sources of Fides report, indicating that, following the outbreak of the conflict, out of the ten thousand faithful who lived in the town, only a thousand have remained, who have now been forced to flee in haste to fury. Some mosques in the city have re-launched the message, announcing from the minarets: "Christians must leave Qusayr within six days, which expires this Friday." The ultimatum, therefore, expired yesterday, June 8, and produced fear among the Christian population who had begun to hope again after the presence of Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, the Jesuit who stayed in Qusayr for a week, with the idea of "praying and fasting for peace in the midst of the conflict" (see Fides 30/5/2012).
The reasons for this ultimatum remain unclear. According to some, it serves to avoid more suffering to the faithful; other sources reveal "a continuity focused on discrimination and repression."
Still others argue that Christians have openly expressed their loyalty to the state and for this reason the opposition army drives them away. Now Christian families from Qusayr have begun their exodus of refugees in the valleys and the surrounding countryside. Some have taken refuge with relatives and friends in Damascus. Some families, very few, sought valiantly to stay in their home town, but no one knows what fate they will suffer. Fides sources insist that Islamic Salafist extremist groups, that are in the ranks of the armed opposition, consider Christians "infidels", they confiscate the goods, commit brief executions and are ready to start a "sectarian war". (PA)
(Agenzia Fides 09/06/2012)

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