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# ASIA/SYRIA - Christian killed in Qusayr, where two priests confirm the ultimatum to Christians

Qusayr (Agenzia Fides) - The Christian Maurice Bitar was killed in Qusayr, near the town of Homs where the Christian population - about a thousand people out of 10 thousand who lived there before the beginning of the violence - has been forced to flee after the 'ultimatum launched by an armed faction in the opposition forces led by General Abdel Salam Harba (see Fides 09/06/2012). As anticipated by Fides, some Christians, after the warning, however, chose to remain in Qusayr, exposing themselves to considerable risks. Maurice Bitar was killed by a sniper, with three other men while he was out of the house to buy bread for his family. The Christian inhabitants of Qusayr, local sources of Fides report, suffer harassment such as no vehicular access on streets and the obligation to "give way" if they meet a Muslim, "as in the days of the Ottoman caliphate," notes the source of Fides .
The armed opposition, in fact, as confirmed by numerous observers in Syria and abroad, is gradually radicalizing towards Sunni extremist ideology. There are numerous gangs and military groups that operate in a totally independent manner, outside the coordination of the Free Syrian Army. The ultimatum launched by the faction of Abdel Salam Harba, for example, was not ratified by other groups: in a statement sent to Fides, the coordination of the same Free Syrian Army, stationed at Qusayr, says it is "shocked by the news" and rejects the ultimatum, saying that it is not responsible and does not share it in any way. Two Catholic priests who fled in recent days from Qusayr, reached by Fides, confirm, however, that they heard "with their ears" of the ultimatum, repeated from the minarets of mosques, and left the city with many refugee families.
According to Fides sources, "the situation is unsustainable in the area and exposed to total lawlessness." Christians face a harsh reality: they either join the opposition, enlisting their young ones, or are victims of harassment, discrimination, violence. The fate of Christians in Qusary, concludes the source, could soon touch the 10 thousand faithful who live in other villages in the area, such as Dmeineh, Rableh and Hamra. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 12/6/2012)

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