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ASIA/SYRIA - The Church's efforts to free the kidnapped Christians and to assist the displaced

Aleppo (Agenzia Fides) - There is an effort underway on behalf of the Church to try to free ten Christians who were kidnapped in recent days by an armed group while they were on a bus from Aleppo to Beirut (see Fides 06/11/2012). We are talking about seven Armenians, as reported by Fides, to whom another Christian family is added: Bechara Rabbat, his wife Mary Rose Saghirv and their son George. As reported to Fides Agency by His Exc. Mgr. Youssef Anis Abi-Aad, Maronite Archbishop of Aleppo, the ten were kidnapped in the area of Sarakeb by unidentified gunmen, "We are very concerned. We do not know who took them. We are trying to identify the kidnappers and to establish contact with them. The young Jesuit Fr. Murad Abi Seif and many families are working to try to resolve the case." "The kidnapped are innocent people and out of the logic of conflict, but - notes the Archbishop – among the rebels there are many factions and groups, which complicates things."
Emergency-kidnapping is only one aspect of Mgr.Anis Abi-Aad's work. In such a situation ever more dramatic, the Archbishop spends most of his time meeting refugees, comforting the afflicted, providing for the needy. Being a "Good Shepherd", he visits the refugee centers and the homeless, visits hospitals to "alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people, showing solidarity with all, without exception: this is the mission of the Church." "We do not distinguish between Syrian Christians and Muslims – he explains in a message sent to Fides - but the coordination of all the Churches, of different denominations, is very busy in terms of aid." The richest and most wealthy families in Aleppo, he says, have moved to Lebanon or to the coast, but "more than half of the population is still in the city and refuses to leave their homes despite the fighting: this increases the number of victims."
As Maronite Christians, he adds, "we are giving support to 450 people of different religions and communities, housed in two schools in our community." Schools and mosques welcome refugees and provide assistance while "the Jesuit fathers, with the help of the Franciscan Sisters, prepare more than 6,000 meals a day, which are distributed to displaced families, camped in different places." The Bishop notes the strong solidarity among civilians, "who cry and suffer," and underlined that "in Syria there is not a problem of sectarianism." "Our hope and our greatest desire - he concludes - can only be peace: this is why we pray intensely." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 08/11/2012)

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