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ASIA/SYRIA - Violence and death in the "Valley of the Christians": 150 thousand faithful in terror

Tartus (Agenzia Fides) - About 150 thousand Christians live in fear in more than 40 villages in the so-called "Valley of the Christians" in western Syria. The valley ("Wadi al Nasara"), a historical stronghold of the Syrian Christians, mostly Greek Orthodoxs, received in recent months thousands of refugees from Homs and other cities and provinces. Today Christians are under Islamist militias fire who have settled in the Crusader fortress "Krak des Chevaliers", built in the eleventh century by a Muslim emir, rebuilt by the Knights Hospitallers and today UNESCO world cultural heritage. As reported to Fides, for days the militias from the hill on which the fortress stands, have been firing nonstop against the villages below. In the area barricades were in fact erected by the regular Syrian army, militants' target. The Christian civilians are "collateral victims" that are affected without any care! In recent days, a rain of fire hit the village of Howache, destroying several houses, killing three young Christians, injuring many civilians. The families of the village cry Iyad Salloum, 30, Fady Haddad, 34, while another young man died in the hospital of Our Lady of Hosn. And, in recent weeks, the Christian community in the valley had already counted nine other deaths.
"Christians - a local priest reported the tragic situation to Fides - are very fragile and they want to be neutral, but today our valley is beset by violence and instability that confuse and frighten us. Violence covers and nullifies everything: we are not able to be instruments of dialogue and cohesion, as we want to be." The priest asks the warring parties to "not hit civilians gratuitously, to respect the neutrality of the Christians for their faith and identity, they want to be a factor of reconciliation." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 13/12/2012

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