



ASIA/SYRIA - Priests kidnapped: the Church seeks contact with kidnappers

Aleppo (Agenzia Fides) - Christians in Aleppo are seeking contacts with the kidnappers of the two priests Michel Kayyal (Armenian Catholic) and Maher Mahfouz (Greek Orthodox) kidnapped on February 9 by a group of armed rebels on the road that leads from Aleppo to Damascus. But so far, attempts to open channels and negotiations to free the two priests have failed. The Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Aleppo, Boutros Marayati gives an account to Fides Agency. "The so-called kidnappers - reports to Fides the Archbishop - phoned the brother of one of the two priests and said only: 'They are with us'. But they did not explain what is behind the 'we', and have not asked for any demands. On our behalf, we have limited the area in which they are held hostage, and we are trying to open a channel of negotiation with the tribal leader of that area. So far our attempts have not had concrete effects. We do not know what is the matrix of the group of kidnappers, if we are dealing with rebels, bandits.... We wonder why this choice of kidnapping the two priests was made, among the many passengers of the bus attacked by the kidnappers. "

Father Kayyal and father Mahfouz were traveling aboard a public bus, heading to the Salesian house in Kafrun, On the road that goes from Aleppo to Damascus. Thirty kms from Aleppo, the kidnappers stopped the vehicle, checked the passengers' documents and then they only asked the two priests to get off, bringing them away immediately.

Mgr. Marayati does not confirm the rumors of a ransom of 160 thousand euro required by the kidnappers for the release of two priests. The Archbishop told Fides that since yesterday the area of Aleppo where he resides and the pastoral settlements of the Armenian Catholic community is at the heart of explosions and armed clashes between the loyalist army and rebels. (GV) (Agenzia Fides 15/02/2013)