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ASIA/SYRIA - In Mesopotamia the church of the Franciscans in Deir Ezzor has been destroyed

Beirut (Agenzia Fides) - A violent explosion destroyed the church and convent of the Capuchin Franciscan Friars in Deir Ezzor, in Mesopotamia. The information sent to Fides by Fr. Tony Haddad, Vice-Provincial of the Friars for the Near East, who oversees the Capuchin presence in Lebanon and Syria. The explosion occurred on April 15. "It was the only church in Deir Ezzor still remained almost untouched so far." It is not clear how it was destroyed. According to some reconstructions, the church had been breached and some opposition fighters were stationed there. The regular army then hit the church, destroying it. Others speak of a car bomb placed next to the structure. Fr. Haddad said with great bitterness "all this hate and desecration." In that area – he informs - "there are no more Christians." In past months, given the critical situation, "our two friars who lived in the convent left Deir Ezzor with the Sisters of Mother Teresa and ten elders who lived with us. They were the last remaining Christians. I thank the Lord that the two friars are alive and well. The church of stones can be rebuilt one day, when a spring of peace will appear in our Middle East, " notes Fr. Haddad.
Deir Ezzor is a city in eastern Syria, beyond the Euphrates, between Palmyra and the Iraqi border. "Our presence there dates back to the thirties of last century, but we have been in the Middle East for much longer," said Fr. Tony. "In almost four centuries of history, our Vice-Province has suffered several destructions and persecutions, but it has always risen, with the Risen Christ." Another community of Capuchin Franciscan friars still remains in southern Syria, in Soueida - where two friars live.
According to information of Syrian opposition activists, army planes bombed in the past days two Syriac Orthodox churches in Deir Ezzor and Christian families have left the city due to the intensification of clashes between loyalist and opposition forces. The Syrian Orthodox Church affirms that its churches have been affected in all the provinces, in Harasta, Arbin, Zabadani, Deraa, Aleppo, Damascus, Raqqa. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 19/04/2013)

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