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ASIA/SYRIA - Prayer and fasting in Maaloula, a village symbol of coexistence, threatened by armed groups

Damascus (Agenzia Fides) – One already prays and fasts for peace in Maaloula, a small Christian village in the north of Damascus, where Aramaic is spoken, the language of Jesus. Maaloula is a small Christian village in the mountains, a symbol of Christianity in Syria, inhabited by peaceful people. It is currently under threat of armed groups that could attack and destroy it: for this reason the Christian community in Syria has launched a strong appeal to save Maaloula, joining Pope Francis' hope for peace. The village itself is a sacred place where "houses and churches mingle with one another", explain local Christian faithful to Fides. The shrines of Maaloula - such as the monastery of St. Tecla, inhabited by Orthodox nuns, and the convent of St. Sergius which houses Greek - Catholic priests (Melkites) - are a place of pilgrimage for Christians and Muslims: the place has become a symbol of religious coexistence.
As reported to Fides, currently some armed groups have barricaded themselves on the rock that overlooks the village and could launch an attack at any moment . "It would be a disaster, a blow to the historical, cultural and spiritual heritage, yet another affront to Syrian civilization, pluralism and harmony", remarked the Greek Catholic MP Maria Saadeh in an interview with Fides, in close contact with the parishioners. "We launch an appeal to the contenders, the international community and the Holy See - she says – to leave Maaloula out of the conflict. It is just a place of prayer, pilgrimage and peace". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 05/09/2013)

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