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ASIA/SYRIA - The village of Deir Atieh invaded by Islamists: Christians identified and detained

Damascus (Agenzia Fides) - Militants of Islamist factions have invaded the town of Deir Atieh, north of Damascus, spreading terror, death and destruction. As Fides sources in the Greek Orthodox Church report, the attack took place on 22 November. The militants entered the municipal hospital and took hostage the sick. The museum of Deir Atieh that welcomed thousands of works and precious archaeological finds was devastated. Mosques and churches were hit and damaged. Numerous homes were looted and civilians captured and used as human shields.

The situation is particularly worrying for Christians. The population, about 25 thousand people, have begun to flee. The militiamen examine the identification documents of those who intend to leave the city and retain those who have Christian names. To be able to leave the village, a Greek Orthodox priest had to say he was married and present himself with a woman: he was allowed to go just because he had an Arab name and had no ancestry or Christian reference.

Fr. F.H., who in a note sent to Fides requested anonymity for security reasons, pleads the international community and the Holy See to mobilize in order to arrange for the release of the hostages and save the village of Deir Atieh. It is not clear, notes the source of Fides, what prompted the armed gangs to penetrate the village. Even hundreds of people from Qara, another Syrian village in the mountains of Qalamoun, 90 km from Damascus had found refuge. In recent weeks, Qara had been attacked by Islamist fighters from the city of Arzal. Among the refugees of Qara, who moved to Deir Atieh, there is also the Greek-Catholic priest Father George Luis and all his parishioners. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 25/11/2013)

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