

Christians threatened by Free Syrian Army seek Government Protection

"Armed Islamist Opposition has murdered more than 200 Christians in the city of Homs"

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As the conflict in Syria continues without a resolution, and government and rebel forces are locked in fierce battles across several cities, Christians in the besieged city of Homs were evacuated with the help of a priest on Wednesday.

For months, Christians have been trapped in the crossfire with scarce access to basic necessities such as food, water and medical help, but yesterday Maximos al-Jamal, a Greek Orthodox priest, revealed that he was part of evacuation efforts that saved 63 people.

"Gunmen have told the besieged people that if you go out of these areas, we will die," al-Jamal shared with The Associated Press.

Christians in the warring Middle East nation make up around 10 per cent of the largely Muslim population, but with little government support and the difficulty foreign aid workers have had gaining access to besieged areas, they have had to rely only on themselves and their church.

"I stayed inside Hamidiyeh to protect the churches from looting. I saved 14 icons from the St George church which has been destroyed," shared one Homs resident, Jihad Akhras, who was among the rescued. After negotiations, a deal was made between rebels and troops that allowed 24 civilians to escape on Tuesday, followed by a further 39 on Wednesday.

Homs, the third largest city in Syria, has been hit particularly hard by government bombings and crossfire between Islamic rebels and government forces. The AP reported that Christians have been leaning more toward President Bashar Assad's regime despite the current dire situation, if only due to fears of further persecution they might face if more radical Islamic extremists take control of Syria.

Back in February, a Christian priest in Homs shared of how dire the situation was getting in the city.

"The armed Islamist Opposition in Syria has murdered more than 200 Christians in the city of Homs, including entire families with young children. These Islamic gangs kidnapped Christians and demanded high ransoms. In two cases, after the ransoms were paid, the men's bodies were found," Barnabas Aid, a charity organisation helping persecuted Christians around the world quoted him as saying.

“Christians are being forced to flee the city to the safety of government controlled areas. Muslim rebel fighters and their families are taking over their homes. We need your prayers and we need them urgently,” he added.

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