

# Syrian Christians in Aleppo, Victims of US-EU Sanctions

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*St. Elijah Maronite Cathedral in Aleppo re-opened after years of disuse due to the severe destruction the 18<sup>th</sup> century cathedral endured during battles in the period of [2012 to 2016](#).*

Aleppo had been Syria's largest city and its commercial and industrial hub before the conflict which began in March 2011. Syria is a secular nation, with the pre-war population ratio standing at about 80% Sunni Muslim, and the remaining divided between Christians, Jews, and other Muslim sects.

It is estimated that only 30,000 Christians remain in Aleppo, compared to a pre-war population of 180,000. Aleppo is now the second largest city after the capital, Damascus.

At least three extensive missile attacks and numerous smaller attacks left the cathedral in ruins. It suffered its worst damage in when terrorists following Radical Islam, which is a political ideology, attacked the Christian areas in an attempt to eradicate all Christians and their churches.

The Syrian Arab Army liberated East Aleppo in December 2016, with at least 34,000 armed terrorists and their families removed under a negotiated settlement which the UN oversaw.

"This victory represents a strategic change and a turning point in the war against terrorism on the one hand and a crushing blow to the terrorists' project and their supporters on the other hand," the Syrian army statement said.

The cathedral celebrated Christmas 2016 despite the utter devastation parishioners observed. [Monsignor Joseph Tobji](#), Maronite Archbishop of Aleppo, gave several recent interviews in which he detailed the restoration of the cathedral. He recalled his first sight of the cathedral in its gravest condition, and marveled at how the cathedral had protected the neighborhood residents, and he said, "This house (the church) played a role in receiving the blows themselves in order to protect the surrounding civilians."

Monsignor Joseph Tobji noted the obstacle to rebuilding churches, homes and lives in Syria is not confined to lack of funding only, but also to the US-EU sanctions which prevent any foreign company from selling any product to any Syrian company, including medical needs and the supplies fight against COVID-19.

"It's a sign of hope and rebirth, not only in a material sense but for the entire

community, despite the fact that the numbers of Christians continue to dwindle, [due to extreme poverty linked to the sanctions imposed on the defenseless population](#),” he said.

Recently, the UN Secretary General Antonio Gutierrez has publicly urged the US and EU to lift sanctions on Syria in order to fight COVID-19.

He recalled the Christmas 2016 mass, and the moment during the service when the child Jesus was placed in the manger, which had been constructed from parts of the collapsed roof. He was deeply touched emotionally at the scene, as were other attendees who were crying, laughing, clapping and cheering with joy.

The rebuilding of the cathedral’s roof, which was made of wood, required Italian architects, Italian lumber, and a roofing expert from abroad to complete. The pontifical foundation, ‘Aid to the Church in Need’ (CAN), funded the laborious project.

[Baroness Caroline Cox](#) is a cross-bench member of the UK House of Lords and founder of Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART). Baroness Cox, a Christian peer and human rights campaigner, has been a visitor to Syria during the darkest days of the conflict, and [is opposed to the British government’s foreign policy regarding Syria](#), which is one of ‘regime change’.

The UK Foreign Office urged her not to travel to Syria. In an interview she revealed,

“We get criticized for a lot of the things that we do, like Syria in particular, and yes it does hurt,” because “it detracts from the main issue of what you’re trying to do,” she carries on, “it detracts from the suffering of the people.”

Her Syrian trip, as part of a British delegation, was [widely criticized by the UK media](#), which prefers to sell their own narrative on Syria. She visited Damascus, Homs, Aleppo and the Christian town of Maaloula, and was invited by the [Syriac Orthodox Patriarch, the Grand Mufti and other Church leaders](#).

Baroness Cox spoke with Syrian people, as well as the Church leaders, and realized the alternative to President Assad would be worse, and the [Islamist terrorists were the real enemy of the people](#), regardless of the western media portrayal of them as ‘rebels’.

She recalled the Islamist terrorists had taken 4,000 hostages in East Ghouta, and they promised to release them as part of a negotiated settlement in which the terrorists and their families could leave safely. However, only 200 of the hostages were released, as [the terrorists had massacred the remaining 3,800 persons](#). With atrocities like this in mind, Baroness Cox felt the priority for the Syrian people is to get rid of ISIS and all the other related Islamist groups, and that should be a priority for the UK as well.

She feels the [UK government is prolonging the Syrian conflict](#), and there has been evidence that the UK funded groups affiliated with the terrorists, which has prolonged the suffering of the Syrian people in a proxy war.

Baroness Cox assessed the Syrian people as deeply civilized, and capable of deciding their own political future. She is opposed to the UK government’s continuing commitment to

‘regime change’, which is reminiscent of Iraq and Libya.

She is also deeply concerned about the harsh US-EU sanctions which prevent ordering medicines, medical machines and their parts, and even chemotherapy drugs. The director of the [UN World Health Organization](#) in Damascus has stated repeatedly the sanctions on Syria affect the health of Syrian civilians, including [children with cancer](#).

Baroness Cox witnessed that the Armenian Christian Church in Aleppo, which was horribly damaged in the conflict, has rebuilt six schools, with four of them in Aleppo. The sanctions make it almost impossible to order certain re-building supplies and technical parts from abroad.

A Chaldean Catholic priest thanked Baroness Cox, and the delegation and [urged them to go and bear witness to the western world](#) of what they have seen and learned in Syria. The priest said to them,

“Thank you for coming. You have put your hands into the wounds of our suffering, now you believe, go and tell.”

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