

U.N. Complicity: Whose Rights do the International Organizations Protect in Syria?

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By Alan Lonergan

Any institution or organisation is only as good as the sum of its parts and this is also true for the United Nations. Many who have suffered at the hands of sectarian rebels in Syria have wondered at the behaviour of U.N. and certain western human rights organisations in their coverage of events. The vast majority of displaced Syrians are inside Syria. Estimated at between 5 and 6 million, most have fled to government areas to find safety from rebels. Outside Syria there are 2 million plus refugees. Hundreds of thousands of them have bypassed the U.N. refusing to seek their assistance or have anything to do with them after what they have seen happen in their country.

The U.N. and the Christians of Homs Diocese

In late March 2012 the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and their Emergency Relief Coordinator, [Valerie Amos](#) visited the city of Homs, Syria. In the preceding months Homs had witnesses the single largest act of ethno-religious cleansing in Syria. Approximately 80,000 Christians were forced out of the old city neighbourhoods by western backed rebels. Between 130,000 and 150,000 Christians were forced to flee the general area. It is impossible for the U.N. not to have been aware of what had happened to the Christian community in the city and yet Valerie Amos said nothing, nor did the international media. On the 21st of March 2012 the Vatican's Pontifical Missions News Service, Fides, reported as follows "In Homs there is "an ongoing ethnic cleansing of Christians", being carried out by some Islamist members of the "Brigade Faruq". So says a note sent to Fides by some sources in the Syrian Orthodox Church, which includes 60% of Christians in Syria. Militant armed Islamists – says the note – have managed to expel 90% of Christians in Homs and confiscated their homes by force. According to Orthodox Metropolitan sources, the militants went door to door in the neighbourhoods of Hamidiya and Bustan al-Diwan, forcing Christians to flee, without giving them the chance to take their belongings. In the "Faruq Brigade", note other sources, there seems to be armed elements of various Wahhabi groups and mercenaries from Libya and Iraq."

Five months after her visit to Homs, U.N. official Valerie Amos was attending a U.N. press conference at which she was questioned by a New York based Lebanese reporter Nizar Abboud, about a rebel siege on a Syrian Christian village called Riblah, in the diocese of Homs. Her exact response is as follows:

“On the issue of Christian communities, there is actually very little information. We have some information about two places, one that Christians from a town called Qusayr have moved because of threats and taunts and we also have examples of a backlash against Christians, not only in Qusayr but also another enclave of about 30 villages west of the city of Homs but I am not sure of the specific example that you have been given but those are the ones that I have been advised on”.

Is it possible that she or the U.N. have “very little information”? Reports from the Vatican as to what was happening in the diocese were numerous but perhaps the U.N. like the western media preferred to ignore them as they highlighted an issue they would rather not face up to. It is difficult to believe that several months after her visit to Homs she still remains oblivious to the largest act of ethno-religious cleansing to take place in Syria. In her response she references the town of Qusayr but completely downplays the reality of what took place there. In Qusayr, a third of the town’s residents were Christian, approximately 9,000.

Over time thousands of the town’s Christians and Muslims escaped the conflict that had engulfed them, fleeing rebels and the counter attacks from the Syrian army. The Christians did not “move” because of “taunts and threats” they were victimised and some were the subject of targeted killings. They fled for their lives and the last 1,000 Christians remaining in the town were forcibly expelled by a direct order of rebel commander, Abdel Salam Harba. In her response, she also mentions an “enclave of about 30 villages west of the city of Homs and together with the events in Qusayr uses the term “backlash” to describe what has happened. The word itself implies that the Christians did something that provoked a reaction or “backlash” against them, when in fact they were innocent civilian victims of attacks, motivated by a sectarian rebel agenda that victimised anyone, Muslim, Christian or Druze, who did not agree with it.

✖ The enclave west of Homs referenced in passing by Ms. Amos is actually an area of 40 Christian villages called the Wadi al Nasara (the [Valley of the Christians](#)). It’s normal population is about 150,000 but during the course of this conflict that has swollen to 250,000, as Christians have fled there from other areas to find safety in numbers. The region has not been spared and has been subject to rebel bombings, suicide bombing attacks, kidnappings, random killings and other atrocities.

Image right: A rebel in the old city of Homs, where 80,000 Christians were forced out. He poses with a machine gun in one hand and a processional cross in the other; he is wearing part of the funeral vestments of a Syriac Orthodox priest. In this image he is seen leaning against the funeral hearse of St. Joseph’s Syriac Orthodox Parish. It is said that the rebels in the area used the hearse to transport weapons around the district.

In late June 2013 the Syrian government forces succeeded in retaking the town of Qusayr. One of the stories that came to light after the town was freed was that of a 15 year old Christian girl. In the chaos and confusion of what was happening in the town the previous year she got separated from her parents and was taken captive by the rebels. She was raped by 15 different men over 15 days and became psychologically destabilized and was eventually [killed by the rebels](#).

Valerie Amos is a former British Labour party government minister and baroness in the House of Lords. In March 2003, when Labour party minister Clare Short resigned her post in

protest at Tony Blair and the Iraq war it was Amos who took over as Minister for International Development at the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Amos canvassed African leaders in the run-up to the war on Iraq, visiting Cameroon, Angola and Guinea in a bid to sell the Anglo-American stance. At the time Pope John Paul II tried his best to prevent the war on Iraq. Today we know that that war was fought under false pretences and a knock on effect of the death, devastation and instability that ensued was the rise of an extremism which brought about the destruction of the Iraqi Christian community. In 2003 there were approximately 1.5 million native Christians in Iraq.

Today they number only a few hundred thousand, many of whom are internally displaced. The Chaldean Catholic Patriarch of Iraq recently revealed that in the last ten years the number of Chaldean Catholic churches operating in Iraq has dropped from 300 to 57. Over the last 3 years Syria Christians have feared that under the false pretence of a western backed "Arab Spring" they will suffer the same fate as their Iraqi brothers and sisters. The Chaldean Catholic primate of Syria, Bishop Antoine Audo, said in his 2014 Lenten address: "Until the war began, Syria was one of the last remaining strongholds for Christianity in the Middle East. We have 45 churches in Aleppo. But now our faith is in mortal danger, in danger of being brought to 'extinction, [the same pattern we've seen in neighbouring Iraq](#)."

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