

Syria: Msgr. Jallouf (Latin Vicar), "The local population continue to suffer and to die, but no one talks about it anymore"

"A dire vision has been shown to me: The traitor betrays, the looter takes loot... Watchman, what is left of the night?": Monsignor **Hanna Jallouf**, Franciscan friar of the Custody of the Holy Land and Apostolic Vicar of Aleppo, quotes a passage from the Prophet Isaiah (21:2) to describe the situation in "his" Syria after 13 years of war (15 March 2011 - 15 March 2024). For more than 20 years, Msgr. Jallouf presided over the parish of Knayeh, in the Idlib Governorate - still controlled by the jihadists of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham - and the parishes of Yacoubieh and Gidaideh, the other two Christian villages in the Orontes Valley, about 50 kilometres from Antioch. Father Hanna, who was kidnapped by Al-Nusra militiamen in 2014, has never abandoned his faithful during these long years of war, remaining with them along with his confrere Father Louai Sbai, a symbol of hope for the Church in Syria. This bond is strengthened by the fact that Msgr. Jallouf is the first Syrian to be appointed bishop and, as Apostolic Vicar of Aleppo, he now has jurisdiction over all Latin Rite Catholics in Syria.



[. "Syria has been plunged into a dark tunnel," he told SIR, "and we don't know where it's going to end. This Friday, 15 March, we are facing another year of war. We don't know when or how we will see some light at the end of this tunnel. What makes things worse is that our country has been abandoned.](#)

[Nobody talks about Syria anymore.](#)

[It has been eclipsed by other conflicts, in Gaza and Ukraine, it has almost disappeared from diplomatic agendas, including world news. For many international actors, Syria has ceased to exist, but the situation is serious, the population is suffering from hunger and lack of basic goods. People are still dying in Syria".](#)



[According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\), more than 7.2 million people are displaced inside Syria and more than 5 million are refugees in neighbouring countries: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. More than 16.7 million people inside the country are in need of humanitarian assistance, the highest number since the crisis began. 12.9 million are food insecure. The economic situation is increasingly dire, with an estimated 90 percent of the population living below the poverty line. Economic conditions are worsening fast, with an estimated 90 per cent of the population living below the poverty line. The aftermath of last year's devastating earthquake has further exacerbated the situation. Of the five million Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, more than 47% are children. **Thousands poor.** "This is probably the most terrible moment since the outbreak of the war," explains the Apostolic Vicar. "Today, people in Syria are struggling with the cost of living, corruption, rising crime, lack of work, all the consequences of war, sanctions and closed borders. Wages in Syria are now around \\$25 a month, a sum that only buys a few kilos of meat. How can anyone expect the](#)

people to live like this? Many Syrians are lucky enough to have family members abroad who send them money. Syria, like Lebanon, depends on remittances from its diaspora. The country is full of poor people, those who were rich are now poor. Everyone needs help. As a church we strive to contribute as much as possible, but the needs are enormous.”



Last February, Monsignor Jallouf met with President Assad to bring these difficulties to his attention and to reiterate the Church's solidarity efforts for the population, together with representatives of the various religious congregations in Syria, including the Salesians, Jesuits, Lazarists, Capuchins, Franciscans and the Institute of the Incarnate Word. In this regard, the support of many international Church organisations, such as Caritas, is fundamental. The Latin Church has 172 women religious and more than 60 priests and consecrated persons in Syria.



Monsignor Jallouf's heart goes out also to the Christian villages of the Orontes and to the parish of Knaye, where, he was pleased to say, "my successor, Father Khokaz Iohanna Mesrob, a native of Knaye, arrived a few days ago and has already started to work among the faithful. In the governorate of Idlib, under the influence of Turkey, the situation seems to be improving, according to the information we have received from our local Christians. We have rebuilt their homes and secured the return of property and land. Now their lives are a little more stable. Thanks to the efforts of many organisations, there is better health care, medicines are distributed completely free of charge, and even electricity is guaranteed because it comes from Turkey. However, many serious problems remain because there are many armed groups and militias operating in the area: Turks, Kurds and the Free Syrian Army. Fighting is continuing in these areas too, with many deaths. But nobody says so." **Looking forward to sunrise.** "During the past 13 years of war in Syria, we have seen 'the traitor that betrays, the looter that takes loot...' - remarked Msgr. Jallouf, citing a passage from the Prophet Isaiah - we live in a state of darkness. But we continue to await the sunrise, the sun that can warm the Syrians. We trust in the Lord to touch the hearts of the so-called "powerful leaders" that they may bring about a just, fair and lasting peaceful solution. As Christians, we are called to hope against hope. We have remained here despite persecution and suffering, and we will continue to pray for our country. We pray for the resurrection of Syria, despite the difficulties and the hardships of the present situation.”

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