

Current Situation in Syria

1 October 2014

The conflict in Syria and the exodus of a few million Syrians to neighboring countries is now in its fourth year. The length of this conflict tragically reminds us of the lives lost, as well as Syrian refugee and host-community children and adolescents who lack educational opportunities, who face serious social tensions and suffer from unfulfilled potentials and productivity. A recent study showed that Syrian refugee children and adolescents as well as those who found refuge in the country are experiencing a variety of hardships including isolation and insecurity, psychological distress, extended disruptions of education and exploitative employment.



Since January 2014, the extensive shelling of the City of Aleppo has left part of the city in ruins and caused massive population displacement, as well as the regrouping of the remaining population in the southwestern parts of the eastern city area.

Life in Syria, and particularly in Aleppo, is becoming increasingly expensive and difficult to cope with, with a lack of basic necessities. The economic deterioration and the decrease in job opportunities; in addition, there is a major security threat to regular citizens in Aleppo.



There have been numerous killings and kidnappings on the roads and daily citizens are being targeted and killed in all parts the city of Aleppo. The sound of shells and grenades can be heard any time of the day and night and could target any place any time. When it comes to kidnapping, most victims are adults, and kidnappings take place in all areas. Water and electricity supplies are also often disrupted. Many people have lost their homes and have sought refuge with family and friends away from what was once their home. Millions are not sleeping in their own beds, forced out of their homes to find themselves with their children homeless and living in public parks or in the wilderness. Others are not sure if they

or their children and loved ones will see the light of a new day, tens of thousands of families lost loved ones: a child, a father, a mother, or a husband. Food prices have tripled and the economy is clearly in decline. People in slightly safer areas still don't leave home after sunset unless they go to areas they know well and have easy access to.



Within Syria, the health and humanitarian situation has deteriorated rapidly over the past two years. If you look at the state of hospitals and lack of medical doctors and nurses you wouldn't be surprised as more than 70% of the medical community have fled the city and most health-care facilities are either damaged or destroyed or are in 'opposition areas'. Make-shift field hospitals provide essential basic services but lack the necessary equipment and medical supplies to effectively treat the injured and disabled. Meanwhile, the shelling, the car-explosions, the barrage of missiles and mortars are continuing on a daily basis.



“On September 21 – Armenia’s Independence Day – the ISIS terrorists destroyed the Armenian Saint Martyrs Church in Syria’s Deir el-Zor. Deir el-Zor is the desert, which became the road to death for 1.5 million Armenians that fell victim to the Armenian Genocide planned and perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire in 1915,”. “This is yet another proof of the fact that genocide continues until it’s fully recognized and condemned. And if Turkey has nothing to do with the terrorist act against the Armenian Church, it should immediately come forth with a condemning statement”.

The Armenian Genocide Memorial Church served as a pilgrimage site for Armenians in Syria, and every year, on April 24, special commemoration ceremonies attended by thousands of people would be held at the site. The destroyed church included a museum housing the remains of some of the genocide victims.

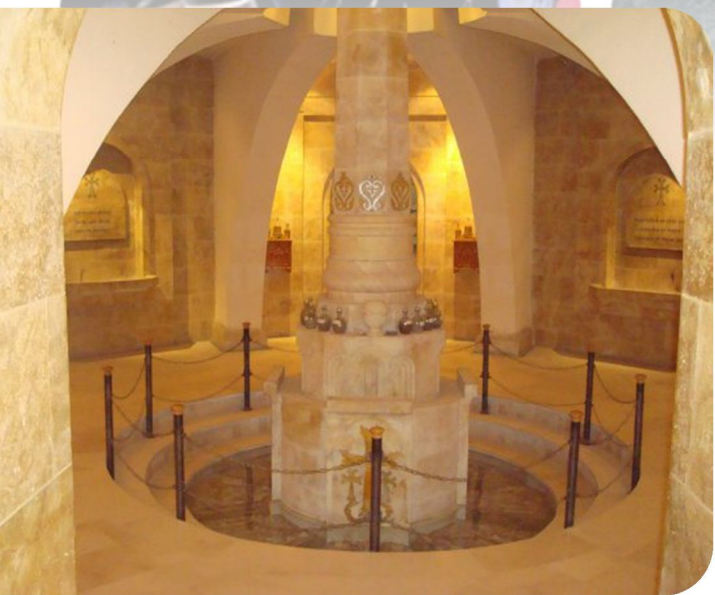
This horrible barbarity committed against the sacred place shows once again the savage nature of the so-called Islamic State terror group. We condemn the destruction of the church and call on the international community to combat the Islamic State.

Terrorist crimes in Syria which are committed by such groups as ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra constitute grave violations of human rights, target civilians and have left a “detrimental impact” on the lives of the Syrians

Late Monday night, American warplanes began bombing about 20 Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) targets. It's a key part of President Obama's strategy for destroying ISIS: weaken ISIS in Syria before more moderate Syrian rebels try to retake the territory it holds on the ground.

The joint statement indicated that a growth of extremism which is drawing foreign jihadists from all over the globe has contributed to the cross-border spread of ISIS and a continuation of the atrocities it is committing in Iraq and Syria.

“This requires that the international community unite to confront this common adversary, which is terrorism in the region”.





As of early June 2014, significant population displacement out of eastern Aleppo was still ongoing due to the further intensification of the conflict.

Syria has one of the biggest Armenian Christian diaspora communities in the Middle East. More and more of them are having to leave their homeland on account of the civil war, and it's possible they will not return, because of basic reasons that facing nowadays in Syria, especially in Aleppo City.

Below we will mention the main causes of migration of our people.

1) **Fear of Daesh Terrorists**

Recently there are claims and threats by the “Daesh” (ISIS or ISIL) terrorist groups that they would enter the city of Aleppo and attack the population. Therefore, the Christian Community in Syria has the growing fear to be suddenly targeted by the Daesh terrorists. The terrorist Daesh group whose name is behind most of the terrorist actions in Syria and Iraq, has grown more quickly and beyond control, and if not stopped soon by the international community, disasters will multiply.



2) Power outages add to Aleppo's suffering

A lonesome darkness hangs over this war-ravaged city. It is as if time has gone hundreds of years back, to an era when electricity was not yet discovered. Near the rubble of destroyed buildings, among dozens of desolate buildings, light emanates from some balconies that are still inhabited, which gives you the feeling that there is still life here.

The electricity network in Aleppo has been severely damaged by the war, with power outages of more than a year in some neighborhoods. For Aleppo residents, electricity is no longer a basic requirement: Its continuous interruption has led them to gradually dispense with it. Having electricity has turned into a luxury.

There is never electricity for more than three hours per day, at best, as electricity is alternatively distributed to the neighborhoods of the city. Add to this the breakdowns in the Zorba line, which occur on a weekly basis. This is causing all of Aleppo to suffer from electricity interruption, as this line is the city's sole electricity source.



3) **Lack of Water:**

Water is one of the nature's most essential gifts to mankind. The basic need for survival of the human being is water, even more so than food. Water is life. It is important for the sustenance and growth of human beings, as well as of all animals and plants. Our body needs water in many different forms in order to keep functioning. Clean water is absolutely essential for healthy living. Since April 2014 water are cut off to the whole city of Aleppo.

The city of Aleppo has been subject to a collective punishment and immoral siege by the armed terrorist groups that have cut off the water supplies, including the clean and drinkable ones, to three million people in the city due to their rejection of the presence of the armed terrorist groups and their crimes against the civilians."

While emphasizing that the rebels' action has created a "big dilemma" for the people of Aleppo, the Armenian Evangelical Bethel Church are exerting huge

efforts to cover people's demands of water by all means by starting water ministry inside the church by providing water from the church which was digged well on Church ground by Barnabas Partners.



4) Poverty:

It has been incredibly hard to encounter human suffering which has not ceased since the beginning of the volatile situation in Syria on the contrary it has

become more dire and complicated and poverty has been persisting and creating complex socio economic conditions.

Prices of food and household essentials in Syria have tripled or quadrupled, impacting the provision of basic supplies and households' purchasing power. Since the economy has been shattered, very few people have an income, so families are struggling to provide their children with basic supplies including bread, vegetables and fruits, milk and eggs. The people mostly haven't sufficient income to meet daily expenses or the necessary assets (savings, a home) to get ahead, even they are *not able* to find a way to *pay* their childrens' *school fees*.



4) Health Problems

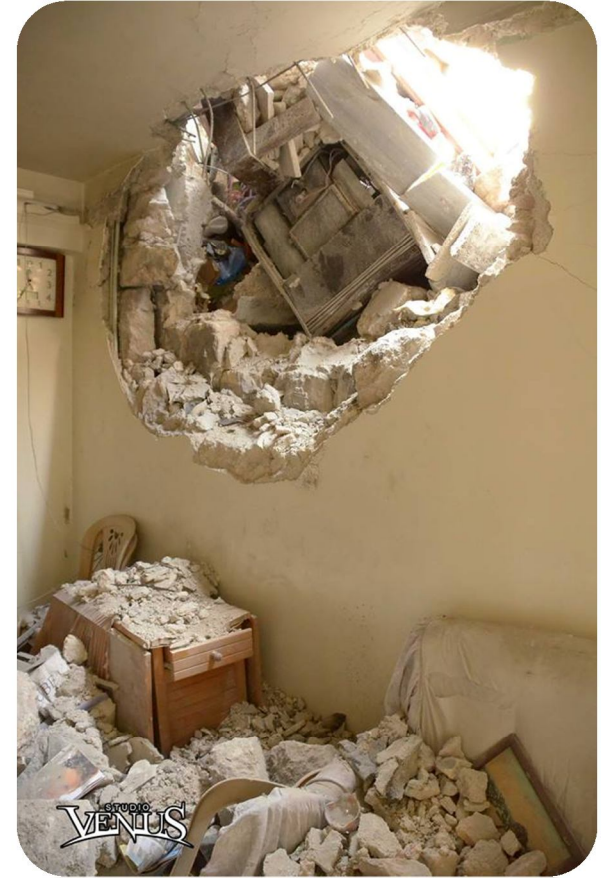
In a small part of the southern area (estimated 13,000 people as of late April 2014), around the Salahaddin District, health coverage by types of health services was reportedly worse. In the northern assessed areas, health coverage was inferior to the entire southern area with all services, apart from vaccination, registering 15% or less coverage.



6) Unsafe Situation

The situation in Aleppo has taken a turn for the worse since the beginning of February 2012. Many people are suffering from various diseases because of the daily fear of rockets and missiles being showered upon them. They are also suffering from trauma having lost family members and relatives to the mortars and shells hitting randomly but everywhere at just any hour of the day and night. And since June 2014 dozens of mortar bombs have damaged or completely destroyed buildings in the predominantly Armenian neighborhoods of Nor Kyugh and Suleimanieh, as the opposition intensified its offensive in areas of Aleppo held by regime forces. The missiles targeting Nor Kyugh (Armenian district) have not only cost lives and casualties but a vast amount of material losses as well. Several apartment buildings have collapsed while others have been completely destroyed.

Hundreds of Armenian families have been forced to leave their homes; some have left Aleppo and have tried to find refuge in the more safer seaside city of Latakia. Armenian residents in the targeted neighborhood have moved in with relatives in neighboring areas and those who have no other place to go, have found refuge in the courtyard of Nor Kyugh's Armenian Church of Saint Gregory the Illuminator. Nowadays, Aleppo's everywhere is becoming unsafe.



We can state that our Armenian Evangelical community in Syria, with no exception, is strongly attached to Syria as their own country and homeland, with profound feelings of love and devotion. Syria is home for many of us. We aspire for a country where we can see the rule of law being practiced. We have contributed positively to the social, economic, religious, and political life in Syria. And we have experienced a great deal of freedom to practice and teach our faith both in our schools and churches.

Our people will continue to work and pray for peace and safety. They will continue preparing for a good future for their children. Syria was in the past a beacon of light and we have great hopes that it will once more be one in the future as well with continuous co-existence, which has been one of the pillars of our nation. We, as the Armenian Community in Syria, will remain faithful and will keep our houses, churches, and organizations alive. The source of strength is not in ourselves: it is God himself. We do not survive under this tremendous pressure by focusing on surviving; and neither do we survive under this pressure by focusing on our own perceived strength. No, we survive under this pressure by keeping focused on God:

"...who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." - 2 Corinthians 1:4