

EMERGENCY SYRIA

The dramatic deterioration of events in Syria is showing no sign of letting up. **Each day increasingly grave news is being received from the Franciscan friars of the Custody of the Holy Land who have remained there to take care of the population.** “Last night more mortar bombs fell on the monastery causing considerable damage”, report the religious of Knayeh (a village along the border with Lebanon), “there is no longer any glass in the windows, the roofs have all been damaged, water is leaking everywhere, people are living in terror of the bombs which continue to fall.”

The attacks, increasingly frequent and seemingly at random, are also crippling the more remote areas of the country. The gravity of the situation is reflected in the words of the Custos of the Holy Land, Father Pizzaballa, interviewed by the Franciscan Media Center: “In the Christian villages along the Orontes [River]”, Father Pizzaballa noted, “there is not much left, of the four thousand inhabitants of the village of Ghassanieh the parish priest has informed me that there is no longer anyone, only about ten people, and the empty houses have been occupied by the families of the rebels who are following along with them.” From Jerusalem the Custos is continuously, and with apprehension, following the evolution of the events as recounted to him by the Syrian brothers: “The picture that emerges is a very distressing one: everyone is shooting at everyone, no one is safe any longer, it's difficult to say if they are aiming at churches or not...what we know is that they are firing, and that these bombs fall all around.”

In the towns hit by the civil war there still remain some who are ceaselessly aiding the poorest, those few who have not managed to escape: “Inside those who are able to do something are doing what they can, helping in various ways, particularly with basic needs. The Jesuits for example have a special dining hall that is feeding thousands of families every day, and the friars are dealing with many displaced families. Everyone is doing all that is possible.” But each day it becomes more difficult. In the face of this picture of fear and confusion **the Custos of the Holy Land continues to direct the attention of the world to this suffering people:** “In addition to prayer I ask all those who can to send help. Not basic supplies – this will not help since they won't be able to enter the country – but money to buy (if need be on the “unofficial” market) whatever is necessary to allow countless families to survive, particularly the poorest ones”.

Help us to support the Syrian people and ensure that food and medicines arrive, and to give concrete support to all the friars and religious living in Syria so that they can continue to represent a sign of hope to all.

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