

Dear friends and supporters,

What is happening in Syria these days strikes us as unexpected and shocking. Nobody understands what is actually happening in the country. The Syrian population is seized by great fear of what is to come. It all happened abruptly and without prior warning – the Syrian people had not been prepared for any of this. This shows the unpredictability of developments when so many geopolitical and power-political interests are involved.

For several days now, I have with great dismay been following the news released by both sides, – the government and the opposition. It is hard to grasp what is currently happening on Syrian soil. Within a few hours, the so-called rebels, revolutionaries, jihadists, opposition troops, armed opposition (called “terrorists” according to official Syrian sources) marched into Aleppo on Thursday, November 28, 2024, between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. and conquered the entire city, a city of about 1 million inhabitants. The capture took place completely unexpectedly and quickly, without any significant resistance from the Syrian army or its allies (Iranians and Russians). They have disappeared from the city. The civilians feel betrayed, alone and defenseless against the terrorists. There were no warnings nor any directives. Understandably, people panicked at first, because the opposition troops are well known from earlier years for their bestiality. The fighters are Islamists from two groups: On the one hand, Hay'at Tahrir Ascham (Committee of the Liberation of Syria), formerly called Al-Nusra Front from the Al-Qaeda terrorist organization, and on the other hand the armed troops (formerly called the “Free Syrian Army”).

The surprising thing is that these armed groups are currently presenting themselves as peaceful. For them, the most important thing seems to be tearing down photos of President Assad and raising the flag of the revolution (black, white and green). They want to be recognized as liberators. They greeted the people on the streets and promised them a better future: A life with constant electricity and water, permanent Internet, liberation from the tyranny of the Assad regime.

Aleppo is in a worrying state of scary silence. The entire city of millions has been paralyzed for days: The authorities are closed after having been captured by the rebels. The schools are also closed, the university lecture rooms remain empty. From 5 p.m. to 5 a.m. there is a curfew. There is very little traffic in the streets. Fuel is scarce and the little fuel that is available is exorbitantly expensive. Most industries and stores are also closed, so there is hardly any work. Nobody knows what is behind this “silence”.

People are very scared in the midst of all this chaos. They are afraid of battles and feel defenseless in the face of the weakening of the Syrian army and of the government. They feel anxious and insecure. The “new rulers” present themselves as friendly. However, their atrocities from the beginning of the war are still present in people's minds. There are currently no police, no army. If someone is killed, there is no court and no justice.

Many people try to leave the city. Those who stay behind have hardly any food. They only get bread and not enough of that either. Everything has become unaffordable. People are in a state of waiting without knowing what fate lies ahead of them. The Syrian population

currently feels threatened from all sides: by the rebels and by numerous world leaders. No one knows how long this situation will last. It is difficult to guess what the powerful politicians are planning for our world.

I asked the Melkite Archbishop of Aleppo, Georges Masri, what we in our role as *Korbgemeinschaft* can do for our brothers and sisters in Aleppo. His answer was: All we can do right now is pray. At the moment, relief supplies cannot even be transported to those in need. But it won't stay this way. One day the light will break through and then the "real work" will begin.

In fact, we need to pray very much to recognize what the will of God is and we need to prepare for the "new Syria". My firm conviction has always been that the works of God become particularly visible in times of crises and of great need. We – as Christians here and in Syria – are called upon to implement these works.



In the midst of all the and worries, our young groups of Latakia never tire of exemplary manner. They are distributing bread and warm clothing that the bishops are surprisingly receiving for the population from the rebels. While the other distribution organizations have withdrawn, our young volunteers continue to courageously hold the ground and offer their helping hands to the bishops.



hardships and despite their own needs volunteers from the local partner *Korbgemeinschaft* in Aleppo and helping their fellow human beings in an

Syria is waiting today for the coming of the Lord. Let us stay connected with Syria in this "time of expectation", the Advent season! Let us prepare ourselves for good times and for bad times! For in the end, we live for the Lord (Rom 14:8)

Brom the bottom of my heart I wish you all a grace-filled Advent season!

Your Fr. Hanna Ghoneim

[www.korbgemeinschaft.at](http://www.korbgemeinschaft.at)

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