

Vienna, April 6, 2025

Dear friends and supporters,

The events in Syria have clearly got out of control. The fears of an impending chaos have unfortunately come true. Every day we hear about unexpected incidents. The population is worried and unsettled. No one knows what the future will bring. For many years, the population of Syria has been longing for peace, stability, economic recovery, reconstruction and improvement in many areas of life. Gradually, there seems to be some light on the horizon. The visit of the German Foreign Minister, Annalena Baerbock, to Syria and the EU's decision to ease the economic sanctions, mention of an aid package of around 6 billion EUR and other announcements have created hopes for improvement among many people. Unfortunately, concrete implementation has so far remained very vague. As a prerequisite for the easing of economic sanctions, the USA then imposed a whole series of conditions that seem difficult for the transitional government to fulfill. In fact, the situation remains bleak and there are many problems that cannot be solved overnight.

Despite everything, we should not give up hope. The problem with politics is that you cannot rely on promises made by politicians. Statements always have to be put into perspective. Many had hoped that the agreement concluded between the Kurds and the new government on March 10, 2025, which was signed as a complete surprise, would serve as the basis for a new constitution. Just three days later, President Ahmad Al-Sharaa announced a so-called "constitutional declaration", in which the afore-



mentioned agreement is barely taken into account. This constitutional declaration gives the interim president more rights in the formation of a parliament and of a government. Some critics raise the question of whether this is indeed the formation of a state or rather of an emirate. The declaration contains many questionable points, which I cannot all list here. However, it is clear that it has Islamist tendencies that cannot be accepted by the Syrian population at large. What is apparently being planned for Syria looks perfidious and unclear. Last Saturday, a Cabinet of 23 ministers was announced. The President also acts as Prime Minister. The ministers are of mixed backgrounds, there is even a (single) female

minister, she is a Christian and will head the Ministry of Social Affairs. This appointment means a lot to Christians.



For Christians in Syria, it is becoming an increasingly logical plan to leave the country. The future in Syria is unclear, unpredictable and uncertain. Church leaders are counselling against emigration, but the encouragement to stay in the country is having little effect. Those who have any

chances to emigrate are taking this step as quickly as possible. Those who have no such chances, are desperate and at a loss.

In principle, there is a lot for Christians to do right now. My advice is not to look too much at politics. Confidence in politicians has become very weak in Syria. Many things were promised during the revolution – for example that a new government would be formed within three months, then it was said that this would happen within six months and now there is talk of a transitional government lasting for five years.

We Christians should rather look at reality and react to it immediately in a way that corresponds to our values. It is certainly not easy, but all good things are possible with perseverance, firm faith and trust in God. “All things are possible to him who believes!” (Mark 9:23). Looking at the world through God's eyes opens up new, hopeful perspectives for a better order.

Especially in the school and healthcare sector, Christians could make a big difference, e.g. by repairing schools and building small health centers. The beautiful project regarding social markets (SOMAs), which I plan to present separately soon in greater detail, the support of social institutions such as old people's homes, orphanages, homes and schools for the disabled, subsidies for staff salaries, as those are far from sufficient for daily life, facilitating renovations, improving infrastructure and equipment. Every charitable and social work should be supported, such as soup kitchens, distribution of food and medicines, help with rental costs and with costs for education. There are countless social projects that need compassionate souls and helping hands. We only have to link these hands together. This is exactly what *Korbgemeinschaft* is trying to do. In my opinion, the time is very favorable for projects of this type.



The reality in Syria has gotten ever worse due to 14 years of war, economic sanctions, a runaway inflation, earthquakes, a pandemic, the Caesar's Act, massive brain drain and other crises. This dramatic reality hurts God's creation and calls on us to help take remedial action.

The country is torn apart and divided into several zones: Sunnites (in the center of the country), Kurds (in the east), Druzes (in the south) and Alawites (in the west on the coast and in the mountains). There are also Russian and American military bases, as well as large camps of ISIS supporters. Except for the latter two, Christians are living in all of these aforementioned zones. They are integrated into society and live peacefully with everyone else.

There is terrible poverty in Syria. In some areas, people are living in famine, not because of a lack of food in principle, but because there are insufficient financial resources. When we talk of so much poverty, it becomes clear why there is corruption, exploitation, theft, kidnapping and crime. This is the bitter reality in which we Christians find ourselves.

When you walk through the streets in the cities, you can sense the great longing of people for a “normal” life. Without help from outside, however, the population still living in Syria will not be able to achieve improvements.

Young people decorating candles for children to be used on Palm Sunday



The empty hands of the poor constitute a mission for *Korbgemeinschaft*. As the foundation logo shows, they represent the basket that receives God's gifts and shares them with fellow human beings. Let us fill them with the gifts that God gives us! Today, immense amounts of money are wasted on armaments, wars and the destruction of God's beautiful creation, unfortunately always at the expense of the vital goods that God gives us. We know, however, that these wars create nothing but misery and poverty.

I mentioned in my latest letter that only the mercy of God can save the people in Syria from their misery. I personally do not consider this to be a naive assumption. If the political and economic means to alleviate the hardships fail, then only the mercy of God remains as an anchor for rescue.

The “Bakery of Grace” is an example of how God is at work in times of need. The bakery was founded in a very difficult period and has not stopped producing good bread ever since. The bread is in great demand. The secret of success lies in the enthusiasm for this meaningful work for the benefit of the people and in the close cooperation of the entire staff. Through this dedication and love, we recognize the mercy of God.

I should like to express my heartfelt thanks to all those who give us hope and confidence for our projects. A big thank you to the teams of the aid organizations who do not let us down and who do their best to support our work. I also want to thank for the many valuable ideas and for the help of all our friends, especially the numerous dedicated women who organize various fundraising events in their parishes, such as parish coffees, flea markets, charity concerts, raffles, Christmas markets, birthday and anniversary celebrations, evening prayers and numerous other activities. Through this service, they fulfill a mission and bear witness to Christ.

Thank you for the many donations in kind and for all the helping hands who support us in collecting, packing and loading the humanitarian goods into containers. A big thank you also for the important contributions towards the transportation costs.



Installation of a large drinking water pump in Maarouneh

And last but not least, I should like to express my heartfelt thanks for the many donations we receive during this time of grace to buy food for 5,000 impoverished families in Syria so that they can experience the joy of Easter.

I wish you a grace-filled Lent and a blessed Easter filled with joy,

Your

Fr. Hanna Ghoneim



Korbgemeinschaft conveys a heartfelt
“Thank You” for all your help and wishes
everyone a blessed Easter
with peace and joy!

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