

The Syrian people are suffering great injustice

Dear friends and supporters of *Korbgemeinschaft*,

It is painful to see what is currently happening in Syria. I have been following the news for months. Indeed, there is a lot I want to say, but much of it is difficult to put into context and the news is very contradictory and confusing. That is why it has been a while since I last sent a description of the situation to you. The reason is not that there is nothing to report, – rather on the contrary: a lot has happened, but hardly anything of it is tangible.

The poor population gets very scarce information about political plans for the future. Quite frequently, something is announced that soon is discarded without further mention. Assessing the political situation remains difficult. Numerous aspects of daily life have become more complicated. Since the upheaval, Syria has been living without a constitution, without a parliament, without a judicial system. The police and the army consist exclusively of HTS members. It is obvious that the new government is far from stable. The population's trust in the government is very weak. On this point, domestic and foreign media seem to be in agreement.



I personally do not want to wait for political solutions, nor do I want to place my trust in them. One cannot fail to notice the fact that the government is committing many political and diplomatic “mistakes” (theologically speaking, “sins”!), and this has extremely negative impacts on the humanitarian situation. The poorest members of the population are always the victims who suffer most. I want to address this problem in my letter in order to raise awareness of and sensitize readers for the plight of the people.

Poverty has remained the biggest problem for years now. Hardly anything is being done to combat it. Although civil servants' salaries were increased by 200% this month, this is still very little compared to the cost of basic everyday necessities. People also expected that the daily hours of electricity supply would be extended. This would be a much-needed boost for the economy. However, given the unfavorable frame conditions, ever fewer businesspeople and traders are investing in Syria. As a result, the unemployment rate remains exorbitantly high.

It has been expected for a while now that refugees from abroad and internally displaced persons would be able to return home. However, on the contrary, the tendency to emigrate is getting stronger, as there are no future prospects in Syria. There is no sign of a reconstruction of the country.

Since it is so difficult to describe the general situation, I would like to use this letter to give a “voice” to some of the people who have turned to us for help.

Their individual stories bear witness to great misery and an urgent need for support from abroad:

- Let us first look at the desperate situation of an approx. 35-year-old nun who runs an old people's nursing home. She explains that the home used to receive donations from charitable benefactors in Syria, which enabled her to cover the deficits of the home. Some of these benefactors have meanwhile left Syria, while others have lost a lot of money themselves or have completely exhausted their reserves from better times. The home is now unable to cover the personnel costs. In this situation, the employees see themselves forced to look for work elsewhere. The income of the home is not even sufficient to buy enough food, let alone to afford adequate medical care. Without outside help, the home can no longer remain in operation. However, the nun cannot simply put the old residents out on the street.
- Next, we are confronted with the situation described by the headmaster of a Christian private school. He is faced with the problem that many children, even highly gifted ones, have to leave the school because their parents can no longer afford the annual school fees. As a result, the school loses an important portion of its income and faces the risk of having to shut down. The ongoing operation of schools is expensive, alone the energy costs are quite high. We receive many similar requests for support in the school sector. For a long time, the children attended Christian private schools, and now financial constraints force them to shift to state schools where the level of education has declined significantly in recent years.
- A conversation with the father of two school-age children paints a very similar picture. Until now, his two children have been attending a Christian private school. Last year, he was still able to pay the annual fees, but in the wake of the upheaval, he can no longer afford the payment for the coming school year. The fees have considerably increased. This man does not want to send his children to state schools, as he is concerned not only about the declined quality level at state schools. It is also the desire to have his children educated in a Christian spirit and mindset that is very close his heart. I have encountered similar cases again and again.
- Now we are looking at the situation of a family (husband and wife aged between 40 and 50 years) with three sons. The youngest of them (10 years old) is physically disabled and in addition he suffers from a speech disorder. The family lives in a village in Syria that is under the control of Islamists. One day, the Islamists suddenly fire shots at the Christian family's home while the disabled child is outside. The worried father rushes outside to look for the child and is killed by a bullet. Now the woman is alone with her three sons. She herself has diabetes and suffers from depression. She has to leave the apartment and is trying to find the cheapest possible accommodation in Damascus, because the disabled child

needs treatment that is only available in the city. The other two children go to school. They have to work in their free time so that the family does not starve. The family needs money every month for food, rent, and medicine. The mother has no income, no widow's pension, and there are no relatives who can support her.

- A woman tells me about her life situation: Her husband's poor health renders him unable to work. Her adult son also lives in the same household and he has a seven-year-old daughter who still has no teeth. This is probably a result of severe malnutrition and undernourishment. The son's income is far too low to consult a dentist or to have medical examinations done.
- Many former engineers, former civil servants, etc. are looking for work. They often served the state for many years and are now without a salary and without a pension. We know dozens of people in such situations.

After the upheaval, hopes for a better life were very high, but unfortunately the concrete developments have been disappointing. For many people, this is very depressing.

What is happening to the poor in Syria is a flagrant injustice. Time and again, the new rulers have made promises they have been unable to keep.

- In my latest letter to friends, we were still hopeful that the sanctions against Syria would be lifted. Now we hear that the US sanctions (the so-called *Cesar Act*) have not been lifted, but have in fact been tightened and extended by another three years!
- For years, the country has seen terrible droughts, leading to widespread crop failures; the heat is getting worse (currently temperatures reach up to 42 degrees Centigrade in many places).
- Many schools and hospitals are in a deplorable condition. They have not been renovated for years due to a lack of resources.
- The concept of "children's rights" is also virtually unknown or totally ignored. Children are eager to learn and they are capable of learning, but there is a lack of good education and of career prospects.
- There have been many abrupt dismissals in the military and secret service; those affected received no severance pays and they are now without jobs.
- Electricity is still heavily rationed, even though the country has oil fields.
- Many businesspeople and traders have given up because of the sanctions.
- People don't have enough bread to eat, while wheat fields lie fallow due to a lack of irrigation facilities, agricultural machinery and equipment.
- 4,000 persons in Syria used to work for the UN. In March of this year, the US president abruptly cut off financial aid for many UN activities, including those in Syria. Employees were dismissed without severance pay and without prior notice.

The countries that claim to intend to "help" Syria are primarily looking out for their own interests. So far, nothing has been done to combat the impoverishment of the population.

Many aid agencies and organizations have withdrawn right in times of most dire needs. This is particularly alarming to us.

Politicians are unable to solve these problems. Unfortunately, I have to acknowledge and accept this as a fact. What I do not understand, however, and what is almost unbearable for me, is the observation that even the Church is doing little or, in some places, nothing at all to combat this bitter injustice. I am firmly convinced that the Church could be of great help in this emergency situation and could show ways of how the problems can be tackled.

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Luke 10:2). Yes indeed, the need is enormous and there is much for us to do! Today more than ever, it is clear that the people in Syria cannot survive without help from outside. The government is also seeking help from abroad. But even if it did receive support from other countries, Christians would certainly not benefit from it, as a former politician confided to me. Christians must somehow manage to get back on their feet on their own.

Jointly with our local partners we have therefore developed the Social Markets (SOMAs) project. As already mentioned in my preceding letter, preparations for the establishment of SOMA



stores are now starting to take shape. Suitable premises have already been made available for SOMA stores in four places.

We have already received initial aid funds to get started. I would like to use this opportunity to express my sincerest thanks to all those of you who have already supported this project with your generous donations. We look forward to being able to provide the approximately 5,000 poor families currently registered with our local helper teams with shopping credits for basic food and hygiene items. As the prices of the goods are kept reasonably low for all other customers as well, we hope for good sales developments so that the SOMAs can gradually become self-sustaining. The goods are purchased in wholesale quantities and, if everything works according to our plans, self-produced items will gradually be added as we go along. This means that we will help to establish small-sized and family businesses so that people in rural areas can work right where they live. The local partners of *Korbgemeinschaft* are responsible for purchasing the goods in bulk quantities and supplying the SOMA stores. Here in Europe, we will cover the start-up



costs. Any support for this project will contribute to sustainable “help towards self-help” in Syria, and every Euro donated is a small building block towards the success of this important social project.

Two empty premises in the Valley of Christians (Safita and Mashta Azar) are available and ready to be used as SOMA shops.

We hope for active support, because every charitable donation has the potential to make a big difference in Syria. It would be wonderful if we could also get functioning machines and equipment in good working condition (fruit presses, filling machines, cooking and baking equipment, grain mills, forklifts, crane trucks, etc.) for small-sized and family businesses. As always, we rely on your active support, including advice and valuable expertise.



In parallel with the SOMAs, we have also launched a larger aid project to support Christian school education. This involves paying school fees for the children as well as contributing to the costs of pedagogues and to the ongoing operating costs. In addition, renovation work is urgently needed at a number of these schools. We are convinced that any investment in education contributes to peace and creates future opportunities for young people.

Of course, we also keep receiving many requests for help with medical care and hospital treatments.

The collection of humanitarian goods and their shipment to Syria also count among our ongoing efforts. Our local helper teams look after the fair distribution of the goods in Syria.

Yes, the need is enormous throughout the country. We remain fully confident that the Lord will not abandon us. God speaks for justice, peace, and social cohesion. There are certainly many people who are committed to these aims. In our role as *Korbgemeinschaft*, it is our task to make sure that the basket does not become empty. And thank God, the basket always keeps receiving funds to be passed on. This shows that God's grace is at work through this basket, i.e. through the many benefactors who keep re-filling it. Thus, the miracle of the “loaves of bread” continues in our days and time.

With my heartfelt thanks for all your help and prayers, I remain
cordially connected with

Your Fr. Hanna Ghoneim

Vienna, August 21st, 2025