

Rev Joseph Kassab, General Secretary,
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Dear Joseph,

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ.

It is with great surprise we note the rapidly changing situation in Syria, and the speedy takeover, first of Aleppo and Hama, and then Homs, Damascus and the levers of government, by forces whose positions on the future governance of Syria is presently unclear. We also note from your update that there are many regional and international parties who are interested in influencing the future in Syria and Lebanon, many with little regard for the best interests of the people. It is a challenging time.

I have heard of NESSL's work with those displaced from Syria and Lebanon by the fighting over the past decade, and by the more recent Israeli attacks. Congregations in Scotland have supported the work of your Compassionate Protestant Society in providing practical help, education, and more, to those forced from their homes. I have heard from Ian Alexander how he visited the Christian communities in Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Muhardi, and Damascus alongside my predecessor, the Very Rev Dr Finlay Macdonald, in 2003. They found a vibrant Christian community playing a full part in society and witnessing to Christ through their lives and service. We recognise that the Christian presence in Syria is a vital one; indeed, the country is made up of numerous minorities who must be allowed to live freely in the new system, their human rights respected, and the rule of law upheld. Your church, alongside the wider Christian community, is salt and light to the wider society.

Lebanon has been a safe haven for so many who fled from the war and the regime. It is to be hoped that these people will find it possible to return to their homes and families and rebuild their lives as everyone pulls together to remake the whole country of Syria. As you wrote, there is a great need to identify common ground among all Syrians to chart a unified vision for the future of the nation, "grounded in justice and the rule of law, where all citizens are treated equally, irrespective of their affiliations."

As we are in the Advent time, we know the power of waiting, not waiting aimlessly, but with the knowledge that something powerful and earth changing can and will break through. As people of faith, we know it is our calling to pray, and also to work against the powers of injustice and to seek to offer God's hope and truth in times of distress. Know that here in Scotland we stand in solidarity with you and give thanks to God for your resilience and prophetic faith. In this season of Advent, we pray that the light will put out the darkness and all the nations will know the light that comes to offer truth and justice for all, and that Syria will experience a new dawn, with better, fairer, more just government which will rule in the interests of all the people, not just the few.

I assure you of my prayers, and the prayers of the Church of Scotland, for NESSL, and all the Churches and communities in Syria and Lebanon, and assure you we will pray and advocate for, "safety, inclusion, and freedom for Christians to practice their faith without oppression or persecution."

Do keep in touch with us and let us know how we can continue to offer support and solidarity.

In Christ, the Prince of Peace.