

## The Conflict in Syria: An Insider's View

**M**other Superior Agnes-Mariam De La Croix, Spokesperson for the Catholic Media Centre of the Diocese of Homs, Hama and Yabroud, Syria, and Representative of the Mussalaha (Reconciliation) Initiative gave an insider's view on the conflict in Syria in an International Affairs Forum moderated by **Dr Chandra Muzaffar**, President, International Movement for a Just World (JUST). ISIS Researcher **Kamal Zharif Jauhari** reports.

Mother Superior Agnes-Mariam De La Croix said mainstream media worldwide depict the wrong picture of Syria. For example, Al-Jazeera had claimed that a village outside of Damascus was under attack. However when Mother Superior Agnes-Mariam telephoned a friend who resided in this village, she was told that no such attack had occurred. Instead of reporting on the truth, the mainstream media resort to employing youths to depict attacks in their studios, she said.

As the conflicts are concentrated around the borders it comes as no surprise that the rebels are made up of mostly non-Syrians. Rebel actions are viewed as an invasion of the nation. Up to five million Syrians have been displaced. As a result more and more beggars are appearing, in stark contrast to the years when there were no beggars. The damage the rebels have caused include the destruction of buildings of historical and cultural heritage, such as shrines, mosques, and churches.

Mother Superior Agnes-Mariam De La Croix is involved in the non-government organization, Mussalaha (Reconciliation) Initiative,

***Money donated to camps that consist only of women and children will end up being used for buying weapons instead of food.***



*Mother Superior Agnes-Mariam De La Croix*

a peaceful initiative to solve the problem in Syria including fixing and repairing the physical damage to the infrastructure of the nation.

One of the activities of the Mussalaha Initiative was holding meetings with the rebels and the Syrian government to discuss the conflict peacefully. Due to their background and activities which include trying to free up to 80,000 Syrian abductees, the Mussalaha Initiative has gained international recognition. The Mother Superior said it needs the support of institutions such as ISIS and other non-government organizations to exert pressure on the Syrian government and the rebels to stop using violence and to resort to peaceful negotiation.

Mother Superior Agnes had some advice for those who wished to donate to the Syrian cause. She advised them to ascertain who it is you are donating to. She advised against going on



*A participant posing a question*

guided tours of Syria and its camps, as one may not be shown the whole truth. Money donated to camps that consist only of women and children will end up being used for buying weapons instead of food.

There are many foreigners in Syria, such as Palestinians, who move around from camp to camp. Another alarming fact is that women in camps are being raped and end up becoming prostitutes because they have no help.

Syria needs international recognition of their current situation to help solve the crisis. Finally she said, in this conflict in Syria where other parties, be they Syrians or foreigners, are trying to break up the Muslim world through various methods, the victims are the Sunni Muslims.

***European countries have not lifted the ban on medicines but ironically, have lifted the ban on weapons***

During discussions following the presentation, the Mother Superior said she was of the opinion that while the Arab world is back in the headlines of the mainstream media, it is an injustice that Arab countries are going against Syria. Qatar has been spending billions on building a death squad and killing innocent people, making the peace movement more difficult to carry out. Libya is another nation from which there is a supply of weapons.

Historically, the role of governing Syria has been handed down from father to son, although the nation claims to be a republic. Remarkably, an independent study conducted by the CIA found that 75 per cent of Syrians want Assad to be their leader.

Another problem regarding this conflict is that no international organization is willing to step in and intervene. She said Malaysia can ease the conflict by not fueling the violence, but by starting a dialogue and discussion between the parties and inviting neighbouring countries to participate. Many people are dying in Syria because of the lack of medicine. European countries have not lifted the ban on medicine but ironically, have lifted the ban on weapons. The Mother Superior ended the discussion by saying 'you cannot bring peace with extremism.'



*Rev David Smith*