

A Troubling Call From Syria

Nuri Kino is a Sweden-based independent investigative reporter, filmmaker, author, Middle East and human-rights analyst. His report, titled "The Camp," which examined the construction of a massive refugee camp for Syrian Christians inside Turkey, appeared May 5 at World Watch Monitor.

Early this morning I received a phone call from Mary, a friend in Sweden who was born in Syria. She wanted me to check my Facebook account. A young Syrian woman, Nour, wanted to become friends with me. I accepted the request. A minute later, Nour wrote me her first message. She had pictures from Tabqa, a town that was totally emptied of Christian Assyrians. Nour also had the contact information of victims of fundamentalist Islam. They, the victims, want the world to know what has happened to them. A group of non-Syrian Mujahedeen drove them out of their message from the perpetrators was "convert to Islam or leave". I called one of the victims, and heard horrifying stories about religious and ethnic cleansing.

Christians in Syria are a vulnerable group. They comprise approximately 8 percent of the population. Tabqa used to be a modern city with cinemas, hairdressers, fashion boutiques and restaurants. Now it is driven by men in beards who no longer allow any of that.

An hour after my interview with that refugee, US Secretary of State John Kerry declared "there must be accountability" on behalf of the victims of a chemical weapon attack. Considering all the evidence emerging from witnesses, from images, from human-rights groups and from medical information provided by Doctors Without Borders, Kerry said "these all strongly indicate" that "chemical weapons were used in Syria," and that they were fired by the Syrian government.

Doctors Without Borders didn't appreciate its medical reports

being used as a justification for possible military action. It issued a statement stressing that only "an independent investigation" can determine whether the hundreds of bodies arriving at hospitals Aug. 21 were killed by chemical weapons, and that the organization has not placed blame anywhere.

While I tuned in to YouTube to listen to Kerry's speech again, an Assyrian refugee who has taken shelter in Lebanon called me. Ninos wanted to know whether I thought NATO will bomb Syria. His family remains in Syria. They fled from rebel-controlled Homs to regime-controlled suburbs. They feel safer in areas where the regime can protect them, where al-Nusra or other fundamentalist Islamists can't persecute them. Ninos said he's afraid that, if the U.S. and its allies enter the war, Christians will be suffer doubly, and that they will be bombed along with Alawites, a Muslim sect that 15 percent of Syrians, including President Bashar al-Assad, belong to.

At the end of his speech, Kerry declared the US must protect the most vulnerable. I wondered if he, and the American allies currently expressing outrage, have thought about Christians like Ninos, his family, and Nour. They have not killed a single soul. They definitely have not gassed anyone. And they are the most vulnerable Syrians of all.