

Syrian Christians Fearful of Extremist Government Control

With Syrian President Bashar al-Assad possibly losing his grip on power and rebels making major inroads, an end to the bloody civil war may be in sight.

The United Nations estimates more than 10,000 have been killed in the violence since the crisis began in March 2011. Another report puts the total at more than 17,000, including 1,261 last week.

Although the defeat of Assad and the military would be welcome news to most, the sizeable Christian community of over 1.5 million is fearful for its future.

Under Assad, Christians enjoyed a measure of freedom to **worship** in Syria, which is 90 percent Muslim. In fact, Christians were granted a degree of **religious freedom** not seen in most other Middle Eastern countries—before and after Arab Spring.

According to Reuters, the rebels include the Free Syrian Army, al-Qaida-style jihadists, the **Muslim Brotherhood** and local pro-democracy Sunni liberals.

“If Assad falls, Christians in Syria are fearful of what will happen when a new government—probably a radical Islamic one—will come into power,” says Open Doors USA president and CEO Carl Moeller. “Will their freedom to **worship** end? Will **persecution** increase? Will they have to flee Syria with their families as have thousands of believers in Iraq?”

“Already thousands have been targeted and have fled Syria. Some have been forced to flee from cities like Homs and seek shelter and help from **Christian churches** in the area. Christians who supported Assad could face reprisal from the

rebels. There is just a tremendous fear for their future.”

A Christian from Syria asks. “What is the free world doing to prepare for that exodus? Who is going to welcome Syrian Christians?”

In the last few months, Open Doors has been responding to the pleas for help by providing emergency relief packages to displaced Syrian Christians as well as food and medical supplies. Open Doors works in partnership with leaders from churches in designated areas.

An Open Doors worker says: “The aid will help them survive. And it will be enhanced by the other work that Open Doors is doing in Syria, such as providing **biblical training**, trauma counseling and **discipleship training**.”

Moeller says believers must get on their knees in **prayer** for the Christians in Syria.

“Pray that if the rebels overthrow the Assad regime, that they will not retaliate against Christians, forcing a mass exodus of believers from Syria,” says Moeller. “**Pray** for an end to the chaos and violence. Pray that Syria will allow freedom of religion for all minorities. And pray that Christians will continue to reach out to Muslims who are also suffering from the violence.”