

INTERVIEW/FATHER DANY

The new Syrian regime shows its true face

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According to the Observatory for Human Rights, more than 1050 civilians have been killed by government or pro-government forces in forty different locations in Syria since 6 March. They majority are Alawites from the coastal towns of Baniyas, Hama, Latakia, Jableh and Tartous, but include Christians and Druze from the southeast. According to the same source, members of the latter two communities were killed 'by mistake' by

foreign jihadists who were unable to distinguish Alawites from other non-Sunni communities.

On the evening of 9 March, Ahmed al Sharaa, leader of Hayat Tahrir al Sham and self-proclaimed president of Syria, announced that he had set up an 'independent' commission of inquiry to investigate who was responsible for the massacres.

The *Daily Compass* discussed these latest events with Father Dany, a priest from Kamishly, a village in Syria's Idlib region that has been under jihadist control for years.

Father Dany, what is happening in Syria?

What can I say? One dictator has been driven out and another has taken his place, and this one is an Islamic fundamentalist.

Why didn't the provisional government dissolve on 1 March as planned?

That is a big misunderstanding. There is no provisional government, this government doesn't want to be provisional, it will last at least three years. Al Sharaa and his people have made that clear. It should be noted that there is no moderate Sunni, no Christian, no Druze, no Alawite in the government: all the ministers are fundamentalists from Idlib.

How can we explain the violence of the last few days?

We must start with recent history. After the fall of the old regime, Ahmed Al Sharaa presented himself as a lamb and made very nice speeches about integration and pacification: sanctions would be lifted, Syria would start producing again. In reality, the new government's economic policies have only brought disaster, as it has proved incapable of dealing with the poverty and hunger that is rampant in Syria, and has dismissed a million state employees and 600,000 members of the army and police. As a result, the past three months have seen street protests and attempts at rebellion against the new government's dictates, which Al Sharaa does not take kindly to. Since appointing himself president of Syria on 29 January, he has begun to physically eliminate the former regular army officers on the pretext that they remain loyal to Assad.

Is there or isn't there a 'loyalist army', loyal to Assad and responsible for violence and aggression, as Ahmed al Sharaa claims?

I'll answer with another question: do you think that if this army had existed, it would not have intervened to defend Assad? Why should it intervene now, three months after the events? The truth is that six hundred thousand unemployed, angry and hungry soldiers are difficult to manage. The current government has asked everyone to hand in their

weapons, but the Druze and Alawites have refused, and not without reason (the former are afraid of the Israeli army, which is advancing in the south, the latter of the Turks, who are expanding in the north without the government doing anything). This was the government's excuse for opening fire, in what turned out to be pure revenge.

So who fired the shots? Is there a regular Syrian army?

The government army is made up of the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham militia and dozens of other jihadist militias, mostly foreigners: Egyptians, Algerians, Chechens, Afghans, Turkmen, who have been given Syrian citizenship in exchange for helping to oust Assad. Many of these foreigners don't even speak Arabic, and they are responsible for most of the massacres that have taken place in recent days. In Jableh they carried out a real genocide, they killed the whole country, both Alawites and Christians. Whole families were forced to leave their homes, lined up against a wall and shot. The father of a priest was killed because he refused to hand over his car. The premeditated nature of these operations is demonstrated by the fact that during the massacres the internet was cut and electricity was cut. In one case, before the arrival of the Al Jazeera film crew, hundreds of civilian victims were dressed in military uniforms to make people believe they were soldiers of the famous 'loyalist army'.

What do you see happening in the near future?

I say thank God what happened happened so that the world can see the true face of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. In three months they have been revealed for what they really are: terrorists. If they don't become human beings, we will have a new civil war and Syria will be a new Iraq, where Christians counted 20%, now they are 2%.