

**THE OMBUDSMAN'S CALL TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ON THE NEW
HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN SYRIA (KESSAB)**

On March 22-25 horrifying events took place in the Armenian-populated town of Kessab and its surrounding villages in Syria. The civilians were the targets of a three day brutal attacks, assumed to be committed by Al Qaeda-affiliated bands. It has been reported that there have been already 80 civilian casualties, 670 Armenian families and the majority of the population of Kessab, were evacuated to safer areas in neighboring Basit and Latakia. We are highly troubled not only for the Kessab but for the Syrian population in general, as the issues in Syria have always been of paramount importance for us.

Sadly the history of Kessab is still adolescent. In the years 1909 and 1915 as a result of the Armenian Genocide by Turkish legions, Armenians were forced to leave Kessab, and today's killings and forced deportation of Kessab Armenians is the third in their history, as again the intent behind those events is to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group. These actions must be considered a serious challenge and threat to the international community and to the fundamental principles of human rights law recognized by all civilized nations.

Taking into account that the Kessab events have the elements of the crime of Genocide as established in the 1948 Genocide convention, Rome statute and also that the prevention of Genocide is considered as an *erga omnes* norm recognized by the UN International Court of Justice, now more than ever, we call on the international society and international organizations to undertake thorough inquires aimed at establishing whether neighboring countries such as Turkey, or other states had effective control of the operations and gross human rights violations committed in Kessab and to safeguard the Syrian population of Armenian or other origin.

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