

Christians, threatened by Syrian war, flee to Lebanon
By Clarissa Ward, CBS News
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BEIRUT - A few of the many Syrian rebel groups are connected to Islamic radicals. Christians, who've lived in Syria for 2,000 years, are fleeing right next door. A convent in the mountains of Lebanon is a refuge for Syrian Christians who have been forced from their homes and their country.

There have been Christians in Syria as long as there have been Christians. Now they are caught up in a civil war increasingly dominated by Islamic militants.

"We came to Lebanon because there is no more living in Syria," Sanharib Aphram told CBS News. "It's dead there."

Aphram made the dangerous journey out of Syria with his wife and three children two months ago.

Already churches have been burned, homes destroyed and Christians kidnapped.

"We are afraid of both sides, the armed militias and the government," he said. "One side is shelling us and the other side is shooting at us. We have no guns. We have nothing."

Christians make up roughly 10 percent of Syria's population. Traditionally, they have supported the Assad regime, which has always protected minorities.

"Many of them are loyal to the government, yes," said Father Simon Faddoul, president of the Catholic Caritas charity. "Maybe they'd say, 'you know, an evil I Sanharib Aphram know is better than an angel I don't know.' It's like, 'I know the regime at least, I don't know what's going to come next.'"

Many Christians are fearful of what might happen if the rebels win. They worry they could face the same kind of religious persecution they've seen in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East.

"You'd see militiamen come in front of churches and making screams, and you know, shooting in the air and such to scare people off," Faddoul said.

There are no official statistics on how many Christians have left Syria since the civil war began. Aphram says he hopes to start a new life in the West.

"If things keep going the way they are in Syria, there will be no Christians left there," he said.

This ancient community may be the next casualty of the civil war.