



## **Statement by DECR Communication Service on the events in Syrian Maalula**

On December 2, 2013, the Orthodox Convent of St Thecla with its orphanage for several dozen orphan girls was captured by the armed Syrian opposition militants during a battle for the predominantly Christian town of Maalula north of Damascus.

It is reported that some nuns and orphans as well as Mother Superior Pelagia (Sayyaf) were taken hostage and driven away in an unknown direction. There are reports that some nuns suffered injuries of various degrees of severity and the convent itself was considerably damaged. The next day, some of the nuns were found, some coming out the hidings after the terrorists withdrew while others were found in hospitals. According to the latest reports, the whereabouts of the mother superior and five nuns is still unknown. A search for them has been mounted.

His Beatitude Patriarch John X of Great Antioch and All the East called the events “a glaring act of aggression against the human dignity, against the voice of peace and prayer”. His Beatitude appealed to the abductors to free the nuns safe and sound immediately and to ensure the immunity of the holy convent. The Primate of the Church of Antioch appealed to the world community to help release the hostages.

The Moscow Patriarchate joins the appeal of His Beatitude the Patriarch of Antioch and expresses full solidarity with the Holy Church of Antioch. The Moscow Patriarchate feels profound sympathy for all the victims and resolutely condemns the cynical action committed by the extremists who deserve a just punishment. The time has come for the people of good will to express unequivocal rejection of such inhumane acts and to unanimously condemn terrorism whatever slogans it may use for cover.

The Russian Orthodox Church is ardently praying for the kidnapped nuns of the Convent of St Thecla and for Metropolitans Paul and Gregory John Ibrahim who were kidnapped earlier, for all Christian captives, both clergy and laity, and for all the much-suffered Syrian people.