

In Libya, Christians bring aid to civilians amid conflict

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Nairobi, Kenya, June 21 (ENInews)--Christians are braving the fighting in Libya to deliver help to civilians trapped in the five-month-old conflict between dictator Moammar Gadhafi's forces and NATO alliance-backed rebels, a senior Roman cleric there said on 21 June.

"The Christians are still in the hospitals and schools. They are giving their share of help to alleviate the situation of the people," the Rev. Daniel Farrugia, a senior Roman Catholic priest at St. Francis Catholic Church in Tripoli, told ENInews via e-mail.

Accurate casualty estimates are difficult to obtain, but they range from 2,000 to 13,000 deaths since the beginning of the year, from various sources including Libya's opposition National Transitional Council, Human Rights Watch, the U.N.'s High Commissioner for Human Rights and others. Recently, civilian deaths have increased. On 19 and 20 June, estimates of civilian deaths caused by NATO forces ranged from 25 to 30.

Fearing reprisal attacks in the mainly Muslim country, many Christians fled as the war intensified, but nearly 3,000 Filipino Catholics remain, according to Libyan church sources. The Christians are working in hospitals where they provide medical, social and psychological services.

He said that Mass is being said as usual every Friday morning, even as NATO forces conduct airstrikes to enforce a U.N.-sanctioned no-fly zone and protect civilians. The action was approved by the U.N. Security Council after Gadhafi's forces attacked civilians protesting his 42-year rule.

"I hope this testimony will serve to make it clear to everyone that above all one should show solidarity to those who suffer," Bishop Giovanni Innocenzo Martinelli of

Tripoli was quoted in media reports as saying in early June.

"We pray this country and its people will find a peaceful solution. The violent way is not the solution. We believe in dialogue and pray for it," said Farrugia. Asked what he thought about the future of the church in Libya, Farrugia said it will continue to stay and will always "dialogue" to find a way of serving Christians there and to give service.

Before the war, there were more than 80,000 Christians in Libya. The Christians came from Asia, Africa and Europe, and belonged to the Catholic, Anglican, Greek Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox and some Pentecostal churches.