

Faith groups and United Nations condemn massacre in Syria

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Geneva (ENInews)--The World Council of Churches joined the international community in condemning the massacre of at least 108 people, including 49 children, on May 25 in the villages of Taldou and Kall Laha in the El Houleh area of Syria.

"I express my deep pain over the massacre of innocent people and especially children," said Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, WCC general secretary, in a statement. "We, as churches, cannot but condemn this inhumane act and manifest our feelings of solidarity with the families of the victims, mourning their beloved ones."

Tveit also called on the "international community to fully support the U.N.'s efforts to bring peace and to put an end to the cycle of violence."

Christian communities, which make up about five percent of the Syrian population, have so far kept a low profile in the conflict.

According to witnesses and survivors, victims in Taldaou were summarily executed in two separate incidents, which local people attributed to the Shabeeha paramilitary organization. The Shabeeha may have acted in tandem with government forces, according to Rupert Colville, spokesman for the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights,

The massacre has also re-ignited fears Syria's 15-month-long crisis could become an all-out sectarian conflict, and possibly spill into neighboring countries such as Lebanon, according to a senior U.N. diplomat, who spoke on the condition of non-attribution.

Kofi Anna, the U.N. special envoy to Syria, met in Damascus on May 29 with Syrian President Bashar-al Assad. He told reporters he conveyed "in frank terms the grave concern of the international community about the violence in Syria, including the

recent shocking events in Houleh."

Tveit said "the WCC has urgently called on the army and other government security agencies in Syria to cease the indiscriminate use of force, ensuring the citizens' right to free assembly and expression. The government of Syria, as all governments, has an obligation to protect its own citizens, and to protect their fundamental human rights and freedoms."