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SYRIA | CSW Calls for Urgent International Action for Release of Archbishops

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is deeply concerned at the kidnapping of the Greek Orthodox and Syriac Orthodox Archbishops of Aleppo and is calling for urgent international action to ensure their swift release.

Archbishop Boulos (Paul) Yazigi of the Greek Orthodox Church and Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of the Syriac Orthodox Church were returning to Aleppo from overseeing a humanitarian effort close to the Turkish border when their vehicle was intercepted in the village of Kafr Dael by gunmen who killed the driver, reportedly also a priest, and abducted them.

In a statement on the incident, Syriac Orthodox authorities identified the gunmen as Chechens, adding that so far they have been unable to contact either the Archbishops or their abductors.

Although several prominent Muslim clerics have been killed during the Syrian conflict, these kidnappings mark the first time senior Christian leaders have been targeted and are likely to heighten concerns amongst Syria's Christian society regarding their future.

On April 15, religious liberty organizations united under the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP) released a statement on the crisis in Syria, asking the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria to pay particular attention to "vulnerable ethnic and religious minorities."

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "CSW is deeply concerned by these kidnappings and our thoughts and prayers are with both men and also with Syrian Christians, who must be deeply disturbed and discouraged by these developments. We urge key members of the international community, and particularly those belonging to the "Friends of Syria" group, to make urgent representations to ensure these men are released swiftly and unharmed, and to encourage every party to the conflict to adhere to humanitarian standards with regard to the treatment of civilians, religious leaders and religious establishments, regardless of creed or ethnicity."