

After 30 years in Syria, outspoken priest is expelled

Tom Gallagher | Jun. 19, 2012 NCR Today

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Syria has expelled an Italian Jesuit priest for his outspoken criticism of the government's crackdown on a popular uprising. The Rev. Paolo Dall'Oglio has lived in Syria for 30 years, helping to restore a 1,000-year-old monastery that became a center for Muslim and Christian understanding.

Dall'Oglio's departure from Damascus on Saturday was sudden. More than a year ago, the government ordered him out, but a campaign on Facebook -- "No to the Exile of Father Paolo" -- delayed his expulsion.

When the anti-government demonstrations began last year, Dall'Oglio supported the young Syrians who risked their lives to protest peacefully.

"I am very moved by the face of many youth that have been suffering enormously to achieve their desire of freedom and dignity," Dall'Oglio said last week from the garden of his home in Damascus as he bade farewell to friends and supporters before his expulsion. "There are so many young persons that are put in jail and tortured, just because they have expressed, nonviolently, their opinions."

His opinions have finally landed him on the wrong side of the government.

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