NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Lebanese bishop says he was target of failed kidnapping

Doreen Abi Raad Catholic News Service | Mar. 25, 2014
Beirut

Maronite Bishop Simon Atallah of Baalbek-Der El-Ahmar said he was the target of a failed kidnapping attempt Saturday.

The incident occurred in the evening when two four-wheel-drive vehicles chased the bishop's car on a major road in the eastern town of Zahle. However, his driver sped toward an army checkpoint, after which the two vehicles drove away.

"What happened yesterday was a shameful act," Atallah told reporters the next day. He said the attempt was most likely motivated by a desire for ransom.

"They (the kidnappers) most probably chased us for the money, but the danger lies in the repercussions of what could have happened," Atallah said, adding that the motive behind the attempted abduction was not sectarian.

Atallah also cited the deteriorating security in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, which borders Syria, expressing concern that the war in Syria could spill over into Lebanon.

"Each and every one of us should work within their community (to put an end to the chaos) as the area is threatened by rockets and car bombs while the borders remain wide open. We now fear that the war (in neighboring Syria) will move to us," he said.

In his homily Sunday, Cardinal Bechara Rai, Maronite Catholic patriarch, denounced the "blatant attempt to kidnap" the bishop, and he mentioned it again two days later, when he asked Lebanon's president and other government officials "to end the phenomenon of kidnapping and extortion."

In addition to an increase in abductions, Lebanon has been wracked by a series of car bombs, suicide bombers and clashes between supporters and opponents of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

"The political, economic, social and security chaos in the country should end," the patriarch said.

Source URL (retrieved on *07/28/2014 - 08:52*): http://ncronline.org/news/global/lebanese-bishop-says-he-was-target-failed-kidnapping