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Syria Kurds help Shiite, Sunni fighters negotiate: NGO



Syrian Kurds in the northern province of Aleppo have helped Sunni rebel fighters negotiate a settlement with Shiite residents in two flashpoint villages, a monitoring group said. Sunni “rebels and Shiite fighters from the popular committees of Zahraa and Nabul have entered into talks, several months into a siege by insurgents of the two villages,” said Syrian Observatory for Human Rights director Rami Abdel Rahman. “The talks were initiated by the Kurdish popular committees,” he told AFP. Though large swathes of Aleppo province have fallen out of the hands of the regime in recent months, the province is home to a variety of ethnic and religious groups, and has seen clashes pitting rebels against Kurds and Shiites. “Both the rebels and Shiite fighters from Zahraa and Nabul have engaged in tit-for-tat kidnapping of civilians. Should the talks succeed, it would mean the regime can no longer claim to be a legitimate protector of Syria’s minorities,” Abdel Rahman said. “The two sides have already released several victims of kidnapping. In the coming hours, we will see whether or not the two sides agree to sign a ceasefire agreement,” he added. The Kurdish initiative comes a month after a prominent Christian dissident brokered a ceasefire agreement between Kurdish fighters and Sunni rebels in the northern city of Ras al-Ain. Despite initial skepticism the agreement would not last, no clashes have since been reported in the flashpoint city. Syria’s two-year conflict has left more than 70,000 people dead. It started out as a popular uprising against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, but spiraled into a civil war after his forces unleashed a brutal crackdown on dissent. Assad’s clan hails from the minority Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, and has frequently warned the country would be overrun by Sunni extremists should the regime fall. While most rebels fighting Assad’s troops are Sunni, most of the country’s Shiites and Alawites have backed the regime.