

Saturday, 23 March 2013

## Funeral held for pro-Assad cleric killed in Damascus mosque bombing



Thousands of people have gathered in downtown Damascus amid tight security for the funeral of a senior pro-government cleric who was assassinated in a mosque earlier this week. Security forces sealed off all roads leading to the eighth century Omayyad Mosque where the funeral for 84-year-old Sheikh Mohammad Said Ramadan al-Bouti was held. Al-Buti, his grandson and 48 others were killed Thursday when a suicide bomber detonated his explosives inside a mosque where al-Bouti was giving a religious lesson. Mourners carried al-Bouti and his grandson's coffin on their shoulders Saturday amid shouts of "God is Great." Al-Bouti was Imam of the Omayyad Mosque, a landmark in Damascus. Syrian state TV said President Bashar Assad was being represented at the funeral by one of his cabinet ministers. On Friday, Assad vowed to rid the country of Muslim extremists whom he blamed for a suicide bombing that killed over 40 people, including a top Sunni preacher. "Those who killed you think they are silencing the voice of Islam and belief in the Syrian nation... they killed you for raising your voice against their ignorant and obscurantist ideas which are intended to destroy the principles of our tolerant religion." Al-Bouti held weekly sermons at the historic Umayyad Mosque and in recent months, Syrian TV has carried his weekly addresses live. Bouti also had a regular religious TV program.