

# Suppressing the Truth on Syria: Mother Agnes Mariam and Britain’s Self Proclaimed “Antiwar Movement”

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Here’s what it looks like when a respected reporter tweets about his blackmail note to an established anti-war organization regarding the organization’s upcoming conference in a [tweet on November 15](#):

I’ve informed organizers of [@STWuk](#) that I will not participate in their conference if Mother Agnes is on the platform.

— jeremy scahill (@jeremyscahill) [15 Novembre 2013](#)

The reporter is [Jeremy Scahill](#), who was booked as the keynote speaker and to show his film “Dirty Wars” (based on his book “Dirty Wars”) at the November 30 [International Anti-War Conference](#) in London, put on by [Stop the War Coalition](#) (STWuk), which was first organized in 2001 in opposition to an American attack on Iraq. More than 12 years later, the coalition notes dryly on its webpage for the conference, “We need more effective anti war resistance internationally. This conference is a chance to analyse, build links and lay plans.”

Scahill’s threat to boycott the conference soon became moot the following day, when the dreaded Mother Agnes withdrew from participation. [Her letter read, in part](#):

“It has come to my attention that my participation in your conference has become a matter of serious contention, even prompting some other speakers to consider withdrawing. This is apparently due to a campaign of cruel and unsubstantiated accusations which seek to work against my efforts and those of the Musalaha (Reconciliation) Initiative in Syria.

“The basis of our work toward peace is reconciliation and forgiveness. This means extending an olive branch to some who may initially refuse it, and accepting an olive branch from others who are despised, even by our friends....

“Some may feel that an injustice will be done if I speak at your conference. Others may think that injustice will be done if I do not. Because my participation in your conference may be used by some to distract from your valuable efforts towards peace, non-violence and reconciliation, I believe it best to withdraw from participation.”

**Why did Stop the War invitation to nun working to stop war raise objections?**

Push comes to shove, and Mother Agnes is an apparent pushover. She's also not flogging a movie. And the abuse she's suffered online was as real as the pressure on Scahill and others to have nothing to do with her. It's hard to find any evidence that Mother Agnes has committed anything worse than what others consider thought-crimes and politically incorrect observations, some of which are actually correct.

Mother Agnes Mariam of the Cross is a Carmelite nun and mother superior of the Monastery of James the Mutilated in Qara, Syria, which has a community of three monks and twelve nuns. Born in Lebanon in a refugee camp 61 years ago, she is Palestinian on her father's side and has worked in Syria for about 20 years. She is the spokesperson for the Catholic Information Center in Beirut, where the Musalaha Initiative also has its office. Mother Agnes became a nun at 19, after several years in the late 1960s as a self-styled "hippie," traveling to Europe, India and Tibet. Unlike others with an equally public profile, Mother Agnes has no Wikipedia page.

In June 2012, Nobel Peace Prize winner [Mairead Maguire](#) praised Mother Agnes as a peacemaker:

"In her community her voice has been clear, pure and loud. And it should be so in the West. Like many people in Syria she has been placed in life threatening situations, but for the sake of peace she has chosen to risk her own existence for the safety and security of others. She has spoken out against the lack of truth in our media regarding Syria and about the terror and chaos which a 'third force' seems to be spreading across the country. Her words confront and challenge us because they do not mirror the picture of events in Syria we have built up in our minds over many months of reading our newspapers and watching the news on our televisions. Much of the terror has been imported, we learn from her. She can tell us about the thousands of Christian refugees, forced to flee their homes by an imported Islamist extreme."

What makes her controversial to people around Stop the War Coalition is their perception of her as a supporter of the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad. Clear reasoning behind this perception is hard to come by. The [reality for Christians](#) in Syria is that their choice of friends is limited: the government represses them along with everyone else, but some rebel groups have taken to [massacring Christians](#). With rebel groups numbering 1,000 or more, none is likely to be a reliable protector.

### **Mother Agnes's heretical view of the Damascus chemical attack**

In August 2013, when the world learned of the still murky chemical weapons attack in a Damascus suburb, Mother Agnes questioned the prevailing western view that the Assad government carried out the attack. She prepared [a 50-page report](#) questioning the authenticity of videos of the aftermath and submitted her findings to the United Nations Human Rights Council. As [the New York Times](#) of September 21 reported:

"When Russia's foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, wanted to bolster [his argument that rebels had carried out the poison gas attacks](#) near Damascus on Aug. 21, he pointed to the work of a 61-year-old Lebanese-born nun who had concluded that the horrifying videos showing hundreds of dead and choking victims, including many children, had been fabricated ahead of time to provide a pretext for foreign intervention.

“‘Mr. Lavrov is an intelligent person,’ said the nun, Mother Agnes Mariam of the Cross, with a wide smile in a recent interview in this Lebanese mountain town. ‘He will never stick his name to someone who is saying stupidities.’”

Taking a position on the chemical attacks that is supportive of the Assad government has led to intensified criticism of Mother Agnes as an Assad pawn. French reporters have written a book accusing her of conspiring with the government to kill [another French reporter](#) in 2012. She has sued the authors for libel.

The Syrian uprising started with peaceful protests in March 2011, but soon turned violent. Mother Agnes accuses the West of fomenting the violence to create a pretext for military intervention and re-ordering Syria. In November 2011, she wrote an open letter to President Assad, challenging the government over its treatment of hospital patients and prisoners, as reported in [Vatican Insider](#) in November 2011:

“Dear Mr. President, I have lived and worked in Syria since 1994, and I have learned to esteem the unique position Syria holds in the world of culture and of religions. But I am shocked to learn from Amnesty International that in the hospitals run by the government the wounded suffer discrimination and maltreatment because of their ideology. And I am saddened to find that, in the prisons, there are people there who have never been tried in court, or even accused of anything.... I ask for a serious inquiry into the hospitals and prisons, under the supervision of the International Red Cross, together with the creation of a committee to accelerate the exercise of justice.”

In late October, Mother Agnes, through the Musalaha Initiative, was involved in establishing a cease-fire and [evacuating some 5,400 civilians](#) from Moadamiya, a rebel-held city near Damascus.

Mother Agnes is currently on a [six-week speaking tour](#) in North America, largely ignored by most media. In Cleveland on November 14, she received a [special peace award](#) from the mayor, a congressman, and a senator. The tour ends December 4.

Jeremy Scahill has yet to explain his own behavior, but columnist Neil Clark, writing for Russia Today, blames “liberal hawks and neo-cons” for silencing the nun because:

“Mother Agnes’ testimony reveals that the so-called ‘War on Terror’ is a sham – that in Syria, the western countries and their regional allies, Saudi Arabia and Israel, are on the same side as the extremist Islamic terror groups that we are told are our greatest enemies.”

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