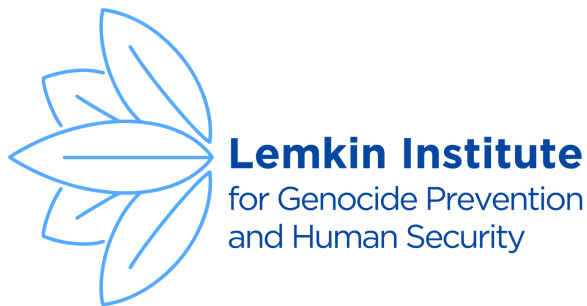




Red Flag Alert for Syria #2 - Genocidal Sectarian Violence Continues Unabated

Published on 24 September 2025

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention is issuing a second Red Flag Alert for Syria due to continuing patterns of sectarian violence towards Syrians – primarily directed at the Alawite minority, but also citizens of other communities, including the Druze and Christians. Three months have passed since our last [Red Flag Alert](#), and the situation has only worsened. We are deeply concerned about the presence of numerous patterns of genocide at once (patterns #2, #5 and #9, specifically), which pose grave threats to the safety of certain ethnoreligious groups in Syria as well as to the security of the entire country. The international community must act swiftly to ensure the security of ethnic, national, and religious minorities in Syria, or we risk being bystanders to a new genocide.

Ongoing Systemic Violence Against the Alawites

The Lemkin Institute continues to assess the risk of genocide against Syrian Alawites as critical, citing continued individual killings, enforced disappearances, kidnappings, and mass displacement in the Syrian coastal governorates of Latakia and Tartous, as well as the Damascus, Homs, and Hama governorates.

A thorough investigation [published](#) by Reuters in late June revealed that five major factions directly tied to Syria's Ministries of Defense and Interior were involved in multiple mass killings. This dispels the narrative of the Syrian government that the violence was primarily committed by external groups. Among these five factions, three former Hay'at Tahrir Al Sham (HTS) units were identified, including the elite Unit 400, reportedly based at the former Syrian naval academy and reporting to the Defense Ministry. They also include the Othman Brigade and

the main law enforcement body linked to the Ministry of Interior – the General Security Service (GSS).

The Reuters investigation further implicated Turkish-backed factions, including the Sultan Suleiman Shah and Hamza divisions of the Syrian National Army (SNA), along with former rebel factions such as Jaysh al-Islam, Jaysh al-Ahrar, and Jaysh al-Izza. Foreign fighters from the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), as well as Uzbek, Chechen, and other non-Syrian Arab extremist militants – and even armed civilians – were also involved in the killings at multiple sites.

There is evidence that the militants involved in the massacres on the Syrian coast are still at large. Multiple videos from the local sources show these extremists enjoying regular activities without being held accountable for the crimes committed. These facts only confirm the absence of real investigation and prosecution of the criminals by the new government.

The complicity of Syria's Defense and Interior Ministries, specifically the General Security Service, as well as the continued freedom and impunity of the militants involved, suggests a serious lack of accountability and transitional justice in Syria. Reuters also reports that the killings are ongoing, a finding consistent with the Lemkin Institute's assessments based on communication with the local sources.

In response to the massacres on the Syrian Coast, the Syrian government formed what it called the "Commission of Inquiry into the Events on the Syrian Coast," which has been criticized by observers as illegitimate and lacking in transparency since it would have to implicate itself to be considered credible. The results of the inquiry were finally released on July 23 after being overdue by two weeks, and, unsurprisingly, stopped short of naming factions in its report. Although the report acknowledged that "violations were widespread," it refused to hold any branch of the Syrian government responsible.

Kidnappings of Women

Perhaps the most alarming recent developments have been the increased number of kidnappings of Alawites across Syria, particularly along the Syrian coast. The fate of kidnapped women and girls is especially concerning. The same Reuters investigation team published a report documenting 33 cases in which Alawite women and girls aged between 16 and 39 were kidnapped by unknown gangs. In many cases, intermediaries contacted families with threats to kill or traffic the victims unless a ransom was paid. The most recent investigation by the Spectator offers testimonies of the survivors who experienced sexual violence.

Based on the Spectator's investigation and the reports given to us from our own Syrian partners with ties on the ground, the Lemkin Institute believes the actual number of kidnapped women on the Syrian Coast is much higher than the Reuters investigation report suggests.

Kidnappings of Alawite women have been reported across several Syrian governorates since March 2025, coinciding with the massacres that have mainly targeted Alawite men. The Lemkin Institute warns that mass killings of men and systemic sexual violence against women from a group are common indicators of genocide. This follows a pattern similar to that of the extremist group ISIS's genocide against the Ezidi people in Sinjar, Iraq, which has been ongoing since 2014. ISIS systematically killed Ezidi men and boys and enslaved women and girls. to achieve the destruction of the group.

Displacement and the Confiscation of Property

Our local sources also report forced displacement targeting Alawite-majority rural villages in Hama. As of July, more than 20 villages have been emptied of their Alawite population, and many properties have been confiscated for agricultural or "reclamation" projects by investment companies linked to the new Syrian government.

Systemic displacement of Alawite Syrians is not limited to the Hama governorate. According to local sources, Alawites in Damascus and its suburbs are also being evicted and having their properties seized. Many of those expelled have fled to coastal villages where they have family roots. By some expert estimates, as many as 500,000 Alawites from Damascus, Homs, Aleppo and other cities have relocated to the coastal heartland in the months following Assad's fall.

In the Damascus area alone, "[w]e're definitely not talking about independent incidents. We are talking about hundreds, if not thousands, of cases of evictions," according to Bassam Alahmad, executive director of human rights group Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ). As a result, the capital and its surroundings are undergoing a profound demographic shift.

According to our Syrian partners, displacement in both Damascus and the Hama countryside has been driven by both the formal actions of Syrian authorities and violent groups acting independently from the government.

Attacks on the Sahnaya, Jaramana, and Druze Students in Dorms

In addition to continued violence and gender-based attacks against Alawites, the Lemkin Institute extends this Red Flag Alert to include rising threats to other groups in Syria, especially Druze and Christian communities.

On April 28, a fabricated audio recording insulting the Islamic Prophet Muhammad was circulated on social media and falsely attributed to the prominent Druze scholar Marwan Kiwan. In response, unidentified gunmen attacked a local Druze militia checkpoint guarding the entrance

of Jaramana, a Druze-majority suburb on the outskirts of Damascus. The violence escalated over the following days, spreading to the nearby Druze-populated suburbs of Sahnaya and Ashrafiyat Sahnaya.

The clashes in Sahnaya and Ashrafiyat Sahnaya resulted in dozens of deaths, including at least ten Druze civilians who were extrajudicially executed by armed assailants believed to be affiliated with the Syrian Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior, according to the [Syrian Observatory for Human Rights](#). In response, armed Druze fighters attempted to support local militias in Sahnaya but were ambushed along the Damascus-Suwayda highway. Many were burned and mutilated by the ambushers, who chanted anti-Druze sectarian slogans.

The fabricated audio recording also triggered mob attacks against Druze students in university dorms across Syria, including in Aleppo, Homs, Hama, and Latakia. Videos later showed Druze students evacuating their dorms in Damascus and other cities due to the attacks. According to witness [testimonies](#), students left because of sectarian harassment, including verbal abuse and [physical violence](#). Some were injured, including a Druze mechanical engineering student who was [stabbed](#) at Aleppo University.

Many Syrians on social media [voiced outrage](#) over the incidents, noting their historically unprecedented nature. Syrian universities have long served as spaces where students from different backgrounds come together peacefully to learn, form connections, and engage in dialogue.

As Druze students fled their dorms and returned to their hometowns, state media and pro-government outlets [denied](#) that they were forced to leave by the incitement. Instead, [these outlets](#) and [affiliated journalists](#) falsely claimed that the evacuations were unprovoked and orchestrated by Druze elders.

In response, students from the Druze-majority governorate of As-Suwayda [issued a statement](#) on May 8th, and rejected the claim that they received “orders or instructions from any party,” but rather that they left on their own accord to avoid the sectarian incitement on their campuses. They further rejected sectarian strife and affirmed their commitment to national unity. Two days later, on May 10th, a delegation from As-Suwayda met in Damascus with the Ministers of Interior and Higher Education. Following this meeting, the Ministry of Higher Education issued a [directive](#) banning sectarian incitement as “strictly prohibited, with criminal penalties for violators.” While the language and conclusions of this decision are welcome developments, the Lemkin Institute believes the current Syrian government’s pattern of conduct over the past months indicates its unwillingness to hold itself accountable and to genuinely check those entities that are inciting sectarian violence.

The findings of the report by *Syrians for Truth and Justice*, covering gross violations against the Druze community during the spiral of violence in April-May 2025, raise serious concerns about the nature of the crimes committed by the military units linked to the Syrian transitional government, suggesting that they potentially amount to war crimes and/or crimes against humanity. In particular, the organization concludes that “the gravity and recurrence” of these violations strongly suggests that these acts may have been committed “as a part of a broader policy targeting the Druze”. This report’s conclusion is consistent with the Lemkin Institute’s analysis of the situation and confirms our concern over the fate of the Syrian minorities who are currently being targeted by Syrian authorities.

Mar Elias Church Bombing and Situation of Christians in Syria

The Mar Elias Church suicide bombing – executed during Sunday liturgy in the Dweila district of Damascus on June 22, 2025 – resulted in at least twenty-seven deaths and over sixty injuries. According to Syrian residents interviewed by Enab Baladi, the attack has ignited apprehension across Christian-majority communities within Damascus and neighboring cities.

The Syrian Ministry of Interior quickly blamed ISIS sleeper cells, claiming to have circumvented two additional planned attacks; however, many Syrians questioned the speed and conclusiveness of this attribution, emphasizing the new Syrian administration’s lack of transparency and possible internal security failures. The attack highlights how fragile security has become in the post-Assad era – not only for Christians but for every Syrian. President Ahmed Al-Sharaa’s statement on the attacks was noticeably short (a few sentences long), showing a lack of priority given to the safety of Syria’s Christian community. Although he pledged that the government will “work night and day” to capture those responsible, he notably excludes any mention of Christians or the Mar Elias Church itself, and fails to mention the motive of the attack – thus reinforcing a climate of marginalization and unchallenged hate speech against Syria’s Christian community.

The Mar Elias Church suicide bombing fits within a broader yet disturbing pattern of sectarian attacks targeting several minority groups within recent months. The bombing was not only an act of religious violence but also a political message to destabilize the transitional government, question its legitimacy, and foster divisions among Syria’s various sects. The new Syrian administration’s inaction to address these incidents reveals its compliance in dismantling the nation’s intercommunal structure.

Days after the attack, Patriarch Youhanna X of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch stated that “the government bears full responsibility” for the attack. He emphasized that the victims were not simply “deaths” but instead “martyrs of the homeland,” clearly criticizing

pro-government sources refusing to use the word “martyr” to describe the innocent. Patriarch Youhanna X further condemned the government for not sending any officials to the church after the attack — except for Hind Qabawat, the sole Christian member of the new cabinet — despite the Christian community’s ongoing efforts to maintain unity. He urged all Syrians to unite together behind a truly democratic government that hears the people’s demands, echoing the original goals of the Syrian revolution.

The Lemkin Institute supports Patriarch Youhanna’s statements and commends the efforts of Syrian civil society and student organizations to stand against sectarian incitement and to hold the new government accountable for protecting all citizens. These actions of solidarity following the June 22nd Mar Elias Church attack — including the public statement by Druze students, grassroots condemnations of repeated violence, and community delegations — are crucial to transitional justice in the country.

The Lemkin Institute reaffirms its condemnation of the current Syrian government and holds it fully responsible for the ongoing bloodshed. It has not only failed to protect civilians and ensure justice for victims of massacres, displacement, and kidnapping, but also has actively encouraged sectarian violence and failed to prevent incitement.

The Lemkin Institute calls on the international community to condemn these crimes against humanity and take immediate action to facilitate safe return of the kidnapped individuals and to end the cycles of violence. The Alawite community and other ethnic and religious minorities in Syria must be protected from the probable genocidal intentions of militant groups and General Security members.

We repeat our urgent call for the United Nations Security Council to approve a peacekeeping intervention under UN Charter Chapter VII to protect ethnic, national, and religious minorities in Syria. The region has become a hotbed for genocidal “solutions” to a host of political, historical, and resource-related “problems,” and the global order cannot sustain renewed attacks on ancient minority populations. The Security Council should be well aware of the volatile nature of sectarian violence in the region and the consequences of letting things get out of control. Members of the Security Council, especially those who uncritically supported the rise to power of former al-Qaeda militant Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, cannot seriously expect the new Syrian government to pursue good governance towards Syria’s minorities after the past six months of state-supported and state-sponsored sectarian bloodshed.

We further call on external states to strongly condemn the atrocities and pressure the new Syrian government to officially reject genocidal aspirations and extremist ideology and to create a safe and inclusive society for all Syrians.

Finally, we warn the people of Syria that continuation of the current violent sectarianism is very dangerous. If it continues, it will eventually preclude any possibility of national reconciliation, which is a necessary prerequisite for transitional justice and post-war reconstruction and reconciliation. The path of violence only risks dragging Syria into a new chaotic wave of civil war that could result in the partition of Syria by regional players such as Türkiye, Israel, and others.

We urge the people of Syria to stand united in these difficult times and firmly reject any forms of violence against any Syrian citizen, no matter their identity. Syrians from all walks of life should demand full accountability from a government that heralded itself as an improvement on the brutal dictatorship of former President Bashar al-Assad.