

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	609
Land:	Syrien
Kilde:	Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
Titel:	Syria. Situation of the Druze, including whether they are perceived to be loyal to President Assad by the insurgent groups; treatment by the authorities and the insurgent groups (January 2015-November 2015).
Udgivet:	26. november 2015
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	25. januar 2016



Immigration and
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

Syria: Situation of the Druze, including whether they are preceived to be loyal to President Assad by the insurgent groups; treatment by the authorities and the insurgent groups (January 2015-November 2015)

Publisher [Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada](#)

Publication
Date 26 November 2015

Citation /
Document SYR105355.E
Symbol

Related
Document [Syrie : information sur la situation des Druzes, y compris s'ils sont perçus par les groupes d'insurgés comme étant fidèles au président Assad; information sur le traitement que leur réservent les autorités et les groupes d'insurgés \(janvier 2015-novembre 2015\)](#)

Cite as Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Syria: Situation of the Druze, including whether they are preceived to be loyal to President Assad by the insurgent groups; treatment by the authorities and the insurgent groups (January 2015-November 2015)*, 26 November 2015, SYR105355.E, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/568e2c944.html> [accessed 22 January 2016]

Disclaimer This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

1. Overview

Sources indicate that the Druze make up approximately 3 percent of the Syrian population, out of a total population of about 22.5 million (The Arab Weekly 4 Sept. 2015; BBC 19 June 2015; US 30 Apr. 2015, 115-116). Other sources similarly state that there are about 700,000 Druze in Syria (The Washington Post 20 July 2015; The Daily Beast 21 June 2015).

Sources indicate that the majority of Druze live in the southern province of Suwayda [Sweida or Suweida] (The Washington Post 20 July 2015; MEI 13 July 2015; BBC 19 June 2015). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a research fellow affiliated with the US-based think tank Middle East Forum, who provided his own views based on current research on insurgent groups and minorities in Syria, said that there is a large concentration of Druze in Jabal al-Druze (Druze Mountain) in Suwayda province, where Druze are the majority of the population (Research Fellow 5 Nov. 2015). He said that other areas with concentrations of Druze include: Jabal al-Summaq (Summaq Mountain), a region in northern Idlib province with 18 villages; Jabal al-Sheik, a region in Quneitra province on the border with Golan Heights; and Jaramana, a suburb of Damascus (ibid.). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of contemporary

Islam at the University of Edinburgh, whose current research focuses on Syria, similarly stated that areas inhabited by Syrian Druze include "the province of Qunaytra along the ceasefire line with Israel and the neighbourhood of Jaramana in Damascus" (Professor 10 Nov. 2015). The Middle East Institute (MEI), a Washington, DC-based organization founded in 1946 that focuses on increasing knowledge of the Middle East (MEI n.d.), specifies that approximately 25,000 Syrian Druze live in 18 villages in Idlib province, 30,000 in Jabal al-Sheikh (aka Mount Hermon) and about 50,000 in Jaramana (MEI 13 July 2015). Corroborating information on the numerical distribution of Syrian Druze across Syria could not be found among sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Research Fellow stated that the Druze faith is "an offshoot of Shi'a [Shia or Shiite] Islam" and that "[s]ome notable distinctions from mainstream Islam include the lack of mosques, reverence for texts beyond the Qur'an and belief in transmigration of souls" (5 Nov. 2015). The BBC specifies that the Druze faith originates from Shia Islam's Ismailism in the 11th century (19 June 2015). Minority Rights Group International (MRG) notes that the Druze are ethnically Arab, speak Arabic, and that their religion is "closed to outsiders" (MRG n.d.). The same source states that their religion "incorporates many beliefs from Islam, Judaism and Christianity, and is also influenced by Greek philosophy and Hinduism" (ibid.).

A report by the UN's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic indicates that "[a]ll of the Syrian Arab Republic's religious and ethnic communities are suffering as a result of the conflict" (UN 13 Aug. 2015, para. 109). Similarly, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) states that "[a]ll Syrians, including Sunni, Shi'a and Alawite Muslims, Christians, and the smallest communities, such as Yazidis and Druze, are living in bleak conditions and face a dire future" (US 30 Apr. 2015, 118). The same source reports that the "Syrian crisis has evolved into a largely sectarian conflict," whereby President Assad's regime mainly targets "Sunni Muslims civilians," while extremists opposition groups, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) [aka ISIS or IS], target the regime, its supporters, religious minorities and Muslims opposing their ideology (ibid., 115-116).

2. Perception of the Druze's Loyalty to President Assad by Insurgents

In an article published in June 2015 in *The American Interest*, an interdisciplinary magazine focusing on "America's conduct on the global stage" (*The American Interest* 1 Sept. 2005), Itamar Rabinovich, a professor emeritus of Middle Eastern history at Tel Aviv University and former Israeli ambassador to the US (Brookings Institution n.d.), states that

[u]ntil recently Syria's Druze managed to sit on the fence of the conflict, refusing to join the fight, adopting a mildly pro-regime attitude and maneuvering skillfully out of the line of fire (*The American Interest* June 2015).

Similarly, the *Los Angeles Times* reports that Druze religious leaders endorse a "middle path" that calls for "voicing support for peaceful political reform in Syria while rejecting armed rebellion" (21 June 2015). However, the same source adds that the Druze are nonetheless "generally viewed as supporters of the government of Assad," which has made them a target of attacks by opposition groups, including in areas such as Jaramana (*Los Angeles Times* 21 June 2015). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Oklahoma, who has published journal articles on the situation in Syria, stated that "Sunni fighters today view all minorities as supporters of the regime, as such, they are frequent targets of revenge and attacks of opportunity" (Director 3 Nov. 2015). The same source stated that Druze in Jaramana are targeted because that area is "majority Druze and seen to be loyal to the government" (ibid.).

The Professor stated that "mainstream" insurgent groups acknowledge differences between the Druze and the regime, while extremist groups are "more aggressive" towards Druze (Professor 10 Nov. 2015).

According to Al-Monitor, a site providing news and analysis of the Middle East (Al-Monitor n.d.), the majority of the Druze support the regime, although some joined the opposition (ibid. 17 July 2015). The same source notes that there are Druze holding positions in the regime's public administration, army and security forces (ibid.). Sources indicate that there are Druze forming "Popular Committees to defend their homes against rebel attacks" (BBC 19 June 2015), fighting in pro-Assad paramilitary groups (BBC 19 June 2015), or fighting in the regime's army (Research Fellow 5 Nov. 2015). According to the Research Fellow, a "large number" of Druze have died fighting in the Syrian army, particularly Druze from Jabal al-Druze, Jabal al-Sheikh and Jaramana, but many Druze have also "resisted conscription" (ibid.).

Sources indicate that, following gains from opposition groups, the Druze have shown an increasing resistance towards the Syrian authorities (BBC 19 June 2015; The Washington Post 20 July 2015). The Druze have reportedly been particularly opposed to members of their community being forced into regime military service (The Washington Post 20 July 2015; Professor 10 Nov. 2015).

3. Treatment of the Druze

3.1 Treatment of the Druze by President Assad's Government

Sources report on arrests made by Syrian authorities of Druze refusing to join the army (The Daily Beast 21 June 2015; The Washington Post 20 July 2015; BBC 19 June 2015). Sources report that authorities agreed to allow them to fight only within their home province (The Washington Post 20 July 2015; BBC 19 June 2015), which the BBC states was an attempt to "calm the situation" (ibid.).

Sources report on allegations that Syrian authorities were responsible for the death, in September 2015, of Sheikh Wahid Balhous [Sheik Wahid Bul'us or Sheikh Abu Fahad Waheed al-Bal'ous] (Professor 10 Nov. 2015; Research Fellow 5 Nov. 2015; AP 5 Sept. 2015), a Druze religious leader in Sweida (ibid.). Sources report that Sheikh Wahid Balhous was killed by a car bomb, along with about 25 other people (Professor 10 Nov. 2015; AP 5 Sept. 2015). The Associated Press (AP) describes Sheikh Wahid Balhous as a "prominent critic of President Bashar Assad, calling on youth in the Druze stronghold of Sweida province to refuse to serve in the military" (ibid.). The Professor stated that the Sheikh was the leader of a group called "Sheikhs of Dignity," which considered that "Druzes should only bear arms to defend their regions against Sunni extremists like ISIS," rather than to support the regime's military in other areas of Syria (10 Nov. 2015). The Research Fellow describes Sheikh Wahid Balhous as the founder of a militia called "'Rijal al-Karama'" [Men of Dignity], which "has worked to protect those resisting conscription and has emphasized military service should only be voluntary" (5 Nov. 2015).

3.2 Treatment of the Druze by the Opposition Forces

Sources report that extremist groups, such as ISIL and the Jabhat al-Nusra [al-Nusra Front], consider the Druze to be "heretics" (Al Jazeera America 2 July 2015; BBC 19 June 2015), "infidels" (The Daily Signal 1 July 2015), or "unbelievers and pagans" (Director 3 Nov. 2015).

The Research Fellow stated that, in January 2015, the Druze of Jabal al-Summaq (in the Idlib region) were compelled to issue a statement renouncing the Druze faith and converting to Sunni Islam after Jabhat al-Nusra gained control of the area (5 Nov. 2015). Similarly, the Swiss newspaper Le Temps reports on the [translation] "forced conversion" of Druze living in the Idlib

region to Sunni Islam, at the beginning of 2015 (23 Aug. 2015). According to sources, the Jabhat al-Nusra threatened to kill the Druze if they refused to convert to Sunni Islam (UN 13 Aug. 2015, para. 130; Research fellow 5 Nov. 2015; Al Jazeera America 2 July 2015). The Research Fellow said that the statement also called for the destruction of Druze shrines in Jabal al-Summaq (Research Fellow 5 Nov. 2015). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources report that, in June 2015, Jabhat al-Nusra fighters killed Druze villagers in the village of Qalb Lawzeh [Qalb Lawsah or Qalb Lawza], in Idlib province (Los Angeles Times 21 June 2015; Al-Monitor 17 July 2015; Al Jazeera America 2 July 2015). Sources report that during this incident, between 20 (Al-Monitor 17 July 2015) and 24 Druze were killed (Al Jazeera America 2 July 2015). Sources report that this incident occurred as Jabhat al-Nusra fighters tried to expropriate Druze homes (Director 10 Nov. 2015; MEI 13 July 2015). The UN reports that Druze residing in Qalb Lawza were also made to convert to Sunni Islam in January 2015 when Jabhat al-Nusra took control of the area (13 Aug. 2015, para. 130).

According to the Los Angeles Times, "dozens" of Druze have been killed in Jaramana by targeted opposition attacks such as car bombs and mortar strikes (21 June 2015). The Director similarly stated that Jaramana "has been frequently hit with car bombs and bombarded with mortars" in targeted attacks by the opposition (3 Nov. 2015).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Al Jazeera America. 2 July 2015. Nicholas Blanford. "For Syria's Druze, Survival Hinges on Choosing the Right Ally." [Accessed 4 Nov. 2015]

Al-Monitor. 17 July 2015. Samir Nader. "Druze Caught up in 'Game of Nations'." [Accessed 4 Nov. 2015]

_____. N.d. "About." [Accessed 25 Nov. 2015]

The American Interest. June 2015. Itamar Rabinovitch. "The Syrian Civil War Comes to the Druze." [Accessed 4 Nov. 2015]

_____. 1 September 2005. "Defining The American Interest." [Accessed 20 Nov. 2015]

The Arab Weekly. 4 September 2015. Samar Kadi. "Druze Minority Shielded by Integration." Issue 21. [Accessed 16 Nov. 2015]

Associated Press (AP). 5 September 2015. "Syrian Druze City Turns on Assad After Top Cleric Killed By Car Bomb." [Accessed 4 Nov. 2015]

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). 19 June 2015. Faisal Irshaid. "Syria's Druze Under Threat as Conflict Spreads." [Accessed 4 Nov. 2015]

Brookings Institution. N.d. "Itamar Rabinovich." [Accessed 20 Nov. 2015]

The Daily Beast. 21 June 2015. Hassan Hassan. "Assad Is Losing His Troops." [Accessed 16 Nov. 2015]

The Daily Signal. 1 July 2015. Charlotte Florance. "Torn By War and Terror, This Syrian Minority Group Is Struggling to Survive." [Accessed 4 Nov. 2015]

Director, Center for Middle East Studies, University of Oklahoma. 3 November 2015. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Los Angeles Times. 21 June 2015. Patrick J. McDonnell and Nabih Bulos. "Syrian Military and Druze Allies Join Forces to Fend off 'Terrorists'." [Accessed 18 Nov. 2015]

Middle East Institute (MEI). 13 July 2015. Ibrahim al-Assil and Randa Slim. "The Syrian Druze at a Crossroads." [Accessed 4 Nov. 2015]

_____. N.d. "Our Mission." [Accessed 18 Nov. 2015]

Minority Rights Group International (MRG). N.d. "Syria--Druze." World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous People. [Accessed 16 Nov. 2015]

Professor, Contemporary Islam, University of Edinburgh. 10 November 2015. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Research Fellow, Middle East Forum. 5 November 2015. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Le Temps. 23 August 2015. "Le dilemme de la minorité druze." [Accessed 4 Nov. 2015]

United Nations (UN). 13 August 2015. Human Rights Council. Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. [Accessed 4 Nov. 2015]

United States (US). 30 April 2015. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). "Syria." Annual Report 2015. [Accessed 5 Nov. 2015]

The Washington Post. 20 July 2015. Hugh Naylor. "In New Sign of Assad's Troubles, Syria's Druze Turn Away from President." [Accessed 4 Nov. 2015]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Amnesty International; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Human Rights Watch; senior fellow, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Internet sites, including: Al-Araby al-Jadeed; Amnesty International; The Daily Star; ecoi.net; Factiva; Freedom House; Heinrich Böll Stiftung; Human Rights Watch; Institute of War and Peace Reporting; IRIN; Global Research; International Crisis Group; The Jerusalem Post; The National [Abu Dhabi]; Syria Direct; Syrian Human Rights Committee; The Times of Israel; United Nations - Refworld; United States - Department of State; The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Copyright notice: This document is published with the permission of the copyright holder and producer Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB). The original version of this document may be found on the official website of the IRB at <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/>. Documents earlier than 2003 may be found only on Refworld.

Search Refworld

by keyword

and / or country	All countries	▼
Clear	Search	

[Advanced Search](#) | [Search Tips](#)

Countries

- [Syrian Arab Republic](#)

Topics

- [Armed forces / Military](#)
- [Armed groups / Militias / Paramilitary forces / Resistance movements](#)
- [Druze](#)
- [Minorities](#)
- [Security situation](#)