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COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION KEY INFORMATION DOCUMENTS

SYRIA

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RDS-IND

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION SERVICE

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ANNEXES

ANNEX A – LIST OF SOURCE MATERIAL

1. Introduction

- 1.01 This Country of Origin (COI) Key Documents has been produced by Research Development and Statistics (RDS), Home Office, for use by officials involved in the asylum / human rights determination process. The COI Key Documents identifies general background information about Syria from a variety of recognised sources. The material identified concentrates on the issues most commonly raised in asylum / human rights claims made in the United Kingdom and are not intended to be exhaustive. None of the documents identified contain any Home Office opinion or policy.
- 1.02 The COI Key Documents provides a signpost to the source material, most of which is readily available in the public domain. For Home Office users, the COI Key Documents provides direct electronic access to each source referred to in the document, via a link on the source numbers in the index and list of sources. For the benefit of external users, the relevant web link has also been included, together with the date that the link was accessed.
- 1.03 As noted above, the source documents identified concentrate mainly on key human rights issues. For background, some basic information about Syria, extracted from the Country Profile on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's website
<http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1021373886647>
is also provided below.
- 1.04 Any comments regarding this COI Key Document or suggestions for additional source material are very welcome and should be submitted to the Home Office as below.

Country of Origin Information Service

Home Office
Apollo House
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Email: cois@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country_reports.html

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2. Basic information on Syria

- 2.01 **Full Country Name:** The Syrian Arab Republic
Area: Total area 185,180 sq. kms
Population: 18 million
Capital City: Damascus
People: Arab 90.3 percent; Kurds; Armenians and others 9.7 percent
Languages: Arabic (official); Kurdish; Armenian; Aramaic; Circassian; some French and English.
Religion(s): Sunni Muslim 74 percent; Alawite eleven percent; Druze and other Muslim sects five percent; Christian (various) ten percent. About 100 Jews remain in Syria.
Currency: Syrian Pound (also called Lira – LSYP).
Major Political Parties: Ba'ath Party
Head of State: Lt-Gen Dr Bashar al-Assad
Prime Minister/Premier: Engineer Mohammad Naji Al-Ottri
Foreign Minister: Mr Farouk al-Shara'a
Membership of International Groupings/Organisations: Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (ABEDA); Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD); Arab League (AL); Arab Monetary Fund (AMF); Customs Cooperation Council (CCC); Economic and Social Commission for Western Africa (ESCWA); Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO); Intergovernmental Group of 24 (G-24); Group of 77 at the United Nations; International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD); International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO); International Criminal Court (ICC); International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (ICRM); International Development Association (IDA); Islamic Development Bank (IDB); International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); International Finance Corporation (IFC); International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRCS); International Labour Organisation (ILO); International Monetary Fund (IMF); International Maritime Organisation (IMO); Intelsat; Interpol; Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC); International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO); International Telecommunications Union (ITU); Non-Aligned Movement (NAM); Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC); OAPC; United Nations (UN); United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO); United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO); United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); Universal Postal Union (UPU); World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU); World Health Organisation (WHO); World Meteorological Organisation (WMO); World Trade Organisation (WTO). [4a]

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GEOGRAPHY

- 2.02 Syria shares a northern border with Turkey, in the east and southeast with Iraq, in the south with Jordan and in the west with Lebanon and Israel. Syria's most contentious boundary is with Israel, where the latter has occupied Syrian territory, the Golan, since 1967. Israel formally annexed the Golan in 1981. Syria also has a short Mediterranean coastline of some 193 kms between Lebanon and Turkey. [4a]

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BASIC ECONOMIC FACTS

- 2.03 **GDP:** \$22.4 billion
GDP per head: US\$1,191
Annual Growth: 3.5 percent
Inflation: 3 percent in 2002
Major Industries: Syrian exports: Syrian exports: \$6.2 billion in 2002 compared to \$4.8 billion in 2000. Oil accounts for between 55 and 60 percent of Syria's total export earnings. Other exports include textiles, cotton, petroleum, food processing, beverages, tobacco, phosphate rock mining, agricultural produce and animals. Imports: \$4.9 billion in 2002. Machinery, food, transport equipment, chemicals and metals.
Major trading partners: Exports: Germany 21 percent, Italy 18percent, Turkey ten percent, France six percent, Saudi Arabia six percent, and Lebanon five percent. Imports: Italy nine percent, Germany seven percent, France six percent, Korea six percent. [4a]
Exchange rate: 1US\$ = 51.9150 SYP (as at 06 April 2006)
- 2.04 The economy is a high priority for President Bashar al Assad. He has begun moving Syria away from a centrally-controlled economy with a cautious opening up of the banking sector and a serious effort to attract foreign investment (outside the oil sector, which has always been a special case and dependent on foreign investment). We (FCO) are trying to help through targeted advice on the ground. [4a]

RECENT HISTORY

- 2.05 Syria gained independence from the French Mandate in 1943. After the 1948 Arab defeat at the hands of Israel she experienced a series of short-lived military governments, followed, between 1958 and 1961, by an unsuccessful experiment of Union with Nasser's Egypt. In 1963 the Ba'ath, a revolutionary party based on the ideas of Arab nationalism and socialism, seized power. In 1966 a radical wing of the Party seized control, expelling the original founders of the Party who eventually established themselves in Iraq, thus instituting a rivalry between Damascus and Baghdad which has persisted ever since. The radicals then moved closer to Moscow, adopting leftist policies which isolated Syria from many of her neighbours. [4a]
- 2.06 In November 1970 the radicals were ousted by Hafez al-Assad, then Minister of Defence, at the head of a more moderate and pragmatic section of the Ba'ath. He repaired Syria's relations with her neighbours, and in 1972 introduced a Constitution under which elections had to be held both for a National Assembly and for the Presidency. Voted in as President he ruled the country until his death on 10 June 2000. Assad's rule brought with it an unprecedented period of stability, being given five seven-year terms in office - the last of which was voted through a presidential plebiscite on 10 February 1999 in which he won over 98% support - there were no other candidates. [4a]

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RECENT EVENTS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

- 2.07 Shortly before the death of Hafez al-Assad, a government reshuffle saw Muhammad Mustapha Miro installed as Prime Minister in March 2000. Dr Bashar al-Assad had been groomed for the Presidency since 1994 following the death of his elder brother Basil, when he was recalled from London where he had been studying ophthalmology to begin military training. Bashar al-Assad was formally inaugurated as President on 17 July 2000 following a referendum which confirmed him as President elect with over 97 percent support. Since his succession, Bashar has reiterated his desire for Syrian modernisation. He has stated that he is committed to fulfilling his father's legacy by achieving peace with Israel, but since the start of the second Intifada in October 2000 prospects for achieving this have dwindled and the newspapers are filled daily with strongly anti-Israeli rhetoric. He has already implemented the first tentative steps towards economic and social reform, but progress is slow. There were some indications of political reform: political discussion groups, for example, were allowed to meet. But there has been a stifling of this progress, for example freedom of expression and association is limited. [4a]
- 2.08 The most recent government reshuffle took place in October 2004. Prime Minister Ottri appointed new faces to his government - though the Interior Minister was the only major change. There is hope that the new ministers will speed up the process of reform, in particular the appointments of Major General Kenaan as Interior Minister and Mahdi Dakhlallah as Information Minister are viewed as positive steps. Kenaan has pledged to reformulate the Syrian security system starting with bringing the security apparatuses under the umbrella of the Interior Ministry as well as restricting arrests to the civil police. The Minister of Information is already taking significant steps to liberalise the media. Dr Deyal la al-Haj Aref, the Ministry of Social Affairs & Labour, has been working in collaboration with the State Planning Commission focusing on human resources development and social equity. There was an expectation that the reform process would be further addressed at the Ba'ath Party Congress in June 2005. [4a]

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Syria's relations with neighbours

- 2.09 Syria has good relations with Iran, and the relationship with Jordan has improved considerably since King Abdullah ascended to the throne (he has had regular contact with Bashar). [4a]
- 2.10 In October 1998, Turkey threatened military action against Syria, in frustration at alleged long-term Syrian hospitality for Kurdish PKK terrorist groups active against Turkey. The dispute appears to have been resolved diplomatically, with Syria meeting most of the Turkish demands. Turkish President Sezer visited Syria in April 2005, following the earlier visit in December 2004 by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Bashar's visit to Ankara in January 2004. This increase in high-level contacts between the two countries has produced water and economic agreements. [4a]
- 2.11 Syrian intervention in Lebanon during the 1980s brought an end to the civil war in that country. By September 2004, Syria still had a military force of

approximately 15,000 men in Lebanon and commanded a high degree of influence there. [4a]

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- 2.12 UN Security Council Resolution 1559, adopted on 2 September 2004, requires all Syrian forces, including intelligence and security personnel, to withdraw from Lebanon; and for all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias to be disarmed. A number of Syrian troops redeployed to the Beka'a valley in 2004, but following the bombing in Beirut on 14 February that killed 20 including former Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri, and injured over 200, there was increased international pressure on Syria to comply fully with the demands of UNSCR 1559. The UN Secretary General's Special Envoy Terje Roed-Larsen announced on 3 April 2005 that Syrian had agreed to a total military and intelligence withdrawal from Lebanon by the end of April 2005. Reports from Lebanon suggest that there are no more than 1,000 Syria troops left in Lebanon, but the dismantling of Syrian intelligence has been less easy to verify. Syria completed the withdrawal of its troops from Lebanon on 26 April 2005, in compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559. A United Nations (UN) verification team concluded that there were no Syrian military forces and no visible or significant Syrian intelligence presence or activity in Lebanon, although the possibility remained of an ongoing influence of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon. [4a]
- 2.13 Syria committed itself to supporting the international action against Iraq in the Gulf War of 1991. Syria backed UNSCR 1441 in calling for Iraq to fully comply with previous Security Council resolutions, but spoke out strongly against the coalition action in Iraq in 1999 and against Coalition toppling (sic) Saddam's regime in 2003. However, Syria is glad to see the back of Saddam. Whilst Syria has taken steps to tighten up its borders with Iraq, concerns remain at the number of insurgents who enter Iraq from Syria, and Syrian support for former Iraqi regime elements living in Syria. [4a]

Syria's relations with the international community

- 2.14 The EU/Syria are pursuing closer relations. The European Council approved the Commission's negotiating mandate in December 1997 and negotiations for an Association Agreement between the EU and Syria started in May 1998. In April 2000, Syria ratified the MEDA framework agreement freeing-up the potential for Euro 100m development funds. Following lengthy discussions, an EU Association Agreement was initialled between the EU and Syria in Brussels on 19 October 2004. Once signed and ratified the Association Agreement will lead to progress towards liberalisation of the Syrian economy in the longer term. [4a]

Middle East Peace Process

- 2.15 President Bashar al-Assad is committed to fulfilling his father's legacy by achieving peace with Israel. Though Syria's ideological support for Palestinian rejectionist groups is seen by many to directly contradict this aim, Syria has said that if the Roadmap for Peace is acceptable to the Palestinians then it is acceptable to Syria. Bashar has sought a bigger role for the EU, rather than the United States, in the MEPP. In December 2004, President Bashar renewed his peace overtures to the Israelis but so far there has been no movement on this. [4a]

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HUMAN RIGHTS

- 2.16 Although there has been a slight improvement under President Bashar al-Assad, concerns still remain about the detention and treatment of political prisoners in Syria. Local human rights groups have no legal existence in Syria. A few are tolerated, but they operate in a grey zone. International human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are as a general rule denied access to Syria. [4a]
- 2.17 Civil societies and NGO's have recently emerged, though having a marginal role. There are about 12 NGOs that receive some official support and are moving from being charitable into becoming developmental. Dr Abdullah Dardari, Head of the State Planning Commission, averred that the tenth five-year-plan (2006-2010) would assign a more considerable role to civil societies and NGOs. [4a]
- 2.18 Most of Syria's ethnic minority groups are fully integrated into Syrian society, with the important exception of the stateless Kurds who mainly reside in the al-Jazira region. This group (approximately 250,000 out of 1-1.5 million Kurds) is not entitled to Syrian nationality and has no civil and political rights. The legal status of resident Palestinians in Syria is almost identical to that of Syrian citizens, with the exception of the right to vote and restrictions on property. [4a]
- 2.19 Religious freedom is provided for by the constitution. Formally recognised religious minorities are generally well respected and have full freedom to practise their faith. [4a]
- 2.20 Syria acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on 23 March 1976, but has not signed the two additional protocols. It has also acceded to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (3 January 1976), the Convention on the Banning of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (21 May 1969), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (27 April 2003). Syria has also ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratification 14 August 1993) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (17 November 2003). On 19 August 2004, Syria signed the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. [4a]

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Information extracted from: Foreign and Commonwealth Office Country Profile: Syria, Last updated on 6 May 2005

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1021373886647>

Date accessed: 28 February 2006

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3. Index to key source documents

(Click source number to access document directly)

3.01

KEY FACTS AND GEOGRAPHY	[1a] Europa, Regional Surveys of the World: The Middle East and North Africa 2005 (51st Edition), Syria, p1044 - 1099 [1b] Europa World Online, Location, Climate, Language, Religion, Flag, Capital, Country Statistics (accessed on 20 January 2006) [2a] United States Department of State, Report on Human Rights Practices – 2004: Syria, 28 February 2005 [2c] United States Department of State (USDOS), Background Note: Syria, last updated January 2006 [4a] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Country Profile: Syria (last updated on 6 May 2005) [7a] British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Country Profile: Syria, last updated on 4 November 2005 [10a] Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), The World Fact book: Syria (last updated on 10 January 2006) [14a] Library of Congress – Federal Research Division: Country Profile: Syria, April 2005. [17a] Syrian Arab Republic, Common Country Assessment 2005: UNDP 2005
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	updated on 11 August 2005) [28] The Political Program Submitted to the Third Convention of the Yekiti Party in Syria, 1999 (Date accessed: 20 January 2006)
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HUMAN RIGHTS – SPECIFIC ISSUES (IN ADDITION TO GENERAL REPORTS ABOVE, INFORMATION ON THE FOLLOWING ISSUES IS PROVIDED IN THE DOCUMENTS LISTED BELOW)	
CHILDREN	[1b] Europa World Online, Education (accessed on 20 January 2006) [2a] United States Department of State, Report on Human Rights Practices – 2004: Syria, 28 February 2005 [2d] United States Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report, 3 June 2005 [11a] Amnesty International (AI) report 2005: Syria, covering events from January to December 2004 [26a] Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2005: Syria (last updated on 11 August 2005) [29a] The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), At a

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	[26a]	Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2005: Syria (last updated on 11 August 2005)
RELIGION	[1b]	Europa World Online, Religion (accessed on 20 January 2006)
	[2a] [2b]	United States Department of State, Report on Human Rights Practices – 2004: Syria, 28 February 2005
	[8c]	United States Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2005, 8 November 2005
		IRIN News.Org, Syria: Bridging the gap between Muslims and Christians. 17 October 2005
WOMEN	[2a] [2d]	United States Department of State, Report on Human Rights Practices – 2004: Syria, 28 February 2005
	[5a]	United States Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report, 3 June 2005
	[8d]	Human Rights Watch (HRW), World report 2006: Syria
	[11a]	IRIN News.Org, Syria: Popular campaign takes aim at “honour killings” 23 October 2005
	[26a]	Amnesty International (AI) report 2005: Syria, covering events from January to December 2004
	[26d]	Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2005: Syria (last updated on 11 August 2005)
		Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Citizenship and Justice. (accessed 20 January 2006)

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Annex A: List of source material

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 - a Regional Surveys of the World: The Middle East and North Africa 2005 (51st Edition), Syria, p. 1044 – 1099
 - b Europa World Online: Syria <http://www.europaworld.com/entry/ao> Date accessed: 20 January 2006
- 2 **United States Department of State (USDOS)** <http://www.state.gov>
 - a Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2004, Syria, 28 February 2005 <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41732.htm> Date accessed: 20 January 2006
 - b International Religious Freedom Report 2005, 8 November 2005 <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51610.htm> Date accessed: 20 January 2006
 - c Background Note: Syria, last updated October 2005 <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3580.htm> Date accessed: 20 January 2006
 - d Trafficking in Persons Report, 3 June 2005 <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2005/46616.htm> Date accessed: 20 January 2006
- 3 **Government of Syria**
 - a Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic, 13 March 1973, <http://www.damascus-online.com/history/documents/constitution.htm> Date accessed: 20 January 2006
- 4 **Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), UK**
 - a Country Profile: Syria, last updated 6 May 2005 <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1021373886647> Date accessed: 20 January 2006
- 5 **Human Rights Watch (HRW)**
 - a World report 2006: Syria http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/01/18/syria12231_txt.htm Date accessed: 20 January 2006
 - b Syria: The Silenced Kurds, October 1996. <http://hrw.org/reports/1996/Syria.htm> Date accessed: 20 January 2006
- 6 **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>
 - a UNHCR Country Operations Plan 2006 – Syrian Arab Republic <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/openssl.pdf?tbl=RSDCOI&id=43327caa2&page=home> Date accessed: 20 January 2006
- 7 **British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)** <http://www.bbc.co.uk/>
 - a Country Profile: Syria, Last updated 4 November 2005 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/801669.stm Date accessed 20 January 2006
 - b Timeline: Syria, last updated 12 October 2005 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/827580.stm Date accessed: 20 January 2006

8 Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)

- a Syria: Year in Brief 2005 - A chronology of democratic developments
http://www.irinnews.org/S_report.asp?ReportID=51058&SelectRegion=Middle_East Date accessed: 20 January 2006
- b Syria: Year in Review 2005 - Developments in democracy
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- c Syria: Bridging the gap between Muslims and Christians
<http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=49586&SelectRegion=MiddleEast> Date accessed: 20 January 2006
- d Syria: Popular campaign takes aim at "honour killings"
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- e Syria: For many Kurds, statelessness remains a way of life.
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- a Buried Alive: Stateless Kurds in Syria January 2006,
<http://www.refugeesinternational.org/content/issue/detail/7829> Date accessed 13 February 2006
- b Country Information: Syria Last updated November 2005. <http://www.refugeesinternational.org/content/country/detail/7267/?PHPSESSID=712992c1e1b689330ba722708482a617> Date accessed: 20 January 2006

10 Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), USA

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