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The State of the World's Human Rights; Syria 2025

The newly appointed president formed a transitional government. Government authorities established a National Commission for Transitional Justice and a National Commission for Missing Persons and began to try five former high-ranking officials for Assad-era crimes. Arbitrary detention continued to be used by the government and by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in north-eastern Syria. More than 30,000 people in SDF custody continued to be subjected to human rights violations. Government forces, government-backed forces and militia members unlawfully killed people from the Alawite minority and extrajudicially executed members of the Druze community. Druze armed groups and Bedouin tribal fighters committed serious abuses in Suwayda governorate, including abductions, unlawful killings and the burning of homes. The authorities failed to adequately investigate abductions of Alawite women and girls or hold perpetrators accountable. Syria faced its most severe drought in decades, worsening the humanitarian crisis. Israel continued to occupy the Golan Heights and moved troops into the UN-demilitarized buffer zone.

Background

On 29 January the Syrian Military Operation Command appointed Ahmad al-Sharaa to lead Syria through a transitional period following the fall of the former government led by President Bashar al-Assad on 8 December 2024. The new Constitutional Declaration endorsed on 13 March by President al-Sharaa provided a framework for a five-year transitional period. On 29 March, President al-Sharaa formed a transitional government, including 23 ministers.

On 10 March, President al-Sharaa and Mazloum Abdi, commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) – the military wing of the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria – signed an agreement to integrate the civilian and military institutions in north-eastern Syria into the Syrian government. The agreement was not implemented.

In May the Ministry of Defence announced the integration of all armed factions into the military.

On 22 June the Syrian health ministry said that at least 25 people were killed and 63 injured in a suicide bomb attack at a church in the capital, Damascus.

The EU, UK and USA lifted or waived most of their sanctions on Syria.

In October, electoral subcommittees elected 122 of 140 MPs. The remaining 18 seats, representing Suwayda, a governorate in southern Syria, and north-eastern Syria, remained

vacant due to ongoing security and political challenges. President al-Sharaa did not appoint an additional 70 members, despite the new Constitutional Declaration requiring such appointments.

The humanitarian crisis remained dire; 16.7 million people required urgent assistance. The UN's humanitarian response plan remained only 10% funded. The USA's sudden suspension in January of much of its humanitarian funding to Syria forced some medical facilities and human rights organizations to close, the suspension of food assistance, and reductions in staff and operations of local NGOs.

In October the World Bank estimated the cost of rebuilding in Syria following 13 years of conflict to be around USD 216 billion.

Freedom of expression, association and assembly

Throughout the year, Syrian civil society organizations and newly established independent media registered and opened offices in Damascus and elsewhere in the country following decades of stifling restrictions on civic space under the former Assad government.

However, repressive legislation remained in place allowing for speech-related prosecutions. For example, on 31 July the authorities prosecuted journalist Nour Suleiman for expressing her opinion online regarding the abduction of Alawite women and girls and other attacks on the Alawite community, accusing her of "spreading false news."

Syrian and international organizations were able to hold public events on human rights issues in different parts of the country. However, towards the end of the year, local authorities increasingly required prior authorization for such events.

Right to a fair trial

The authorities took some steps towards addressing the urgent need for judicial reform. However, the appointment of judges remained firmly in the hands of the executive, the death penalty was not abolished, and crimes under international law had yet to be incorporated into national law.

In June the government suspended the Counterterrorism Court, used by the former Assad government to target perceived opponents through unfair trials. In October the Ministry of Justice announced the annulment of at least 287,000 court sentences issued by the former Assad government's counterterrorism and military courts. This included the annulment of sentences based on charges commonly used to criminalize the exercise of human rights, such as insulting the head of state, insulting the army and participating in protests.

Right to truth, justice and reparation

In May the government established the National Commission for Transitional Justice (NCTJ). While the decree establishing the commission mandated it to address violations by the former Assad government, in November the NCTJ told Amnesty International that it would address abuses committed by all parties to the conflict, including the former Assad government and armed opposition groups; and that the new draft transitional justice law would stipulate this.

In July the authorities arrested former ministers Kinda Shamat and Rima al-Qadiri, and others, for their alleged role in the enforced disappearance of children separated from their detained parents between 2011 and 2024.

The authorities arrested other suspected perpetrators of human rights violations and crimes against people in Syria carried out between 2011 and 2024, including the heads of intelligence branches where people were tortured and forcibly disappeared; suspected perpetrators of mass killings; and other high-ranking officials. In November, the minister of justice confirmed to Amnesty International that five trials of former high-ranking officials for Assad-era crimes were ongoing and dozens of others were in detention pending investigations. At least two high-profile figures from the former government appeared to have been given guarantees against prosecution despite credible information regarding their responsibility for serious human rights violations.

In September the authorities issued an arrest warrant for former president Bashar al-Assad on charges of murder and torture.

Courts in France, Germany and the Netherlands continued to investigate and prosecute people suspected of committing crimes under international law in Syria, including under the principle of universal jurisdiction. International rights mechanisms, including the UN Independent Institution on Missing Persons, were granted access to Syria.

Enforced disappearances

Throughout the year, families of the disappeared organized demonstrations, including sit-ins at “truth tents” across Syrian towns and cities,¹ calling for action to uncover the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones, to recover the remains of those who died, to see those responsible held to account, and to ensure an end to enforced disappearances. Families of the disappeared and survivors of detention expressed frustration that the search for the disappeared had not yet begun in earnest.²

In May the authorities established the National Commission for Missing Persons, which was tasked with “uncovering the fate of thousands of missing persons in Syria and delivering justice to their families”. More than 100,000 people were estimated to have gone missing between 2011 and 2024.

Lawyers reported at least three new cases of enforced disappearance during the year.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

Syrian government

Government authorities arrested members of the Alawite community without arrest warrants. Among them were former Assad government low-ranking officials. Some were subjected to enforced disappearance for several weeks or months before their families were allowed to see them. Throughout their detention, they were not informed of the charges against them, were denied legal counsel, and/or were not brought before a judge.

On 6 March at least 25 Alawite men – including a retired teacher, a student and a mechanic – were arrested from their homes in al-Qadam neighbourhood, Damascus, without arrest warrants. A witness said his brother, who was among the 25, was arrested by general security officers and that his fate and whereabouts were undisclosed.

Syrian Democratic Forces

The SDF was responsible for the large-scale violation of the rights of more than 30,000 people in their custody for their perceived affiliation with the Islamic State armed group. Victims included children, women and men held in at least 27 detention facilities and two detention camps – Al-Hol and Roj – in north-eastern Syria. Many had been detained since 2019.

Activists reported that SDF forces arbitrarily arrested at least five people, predominantly Arabs, for expressing views online in support of President al-Sharaa's government.

Unlawful killings

On 6 March, armed groups affiliated with the former government launched multiple coordinated attacks on security and military sites in the predominately Alawite coastal governorates of Latakia and Tartous. In response the government, backed by supporting militias, launched a counter-offensive. This led to a significant escalation of violence in the coastal governorates, as well as in the governorates of Hama and Homs. The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (UN Col) said that 1,400 people, predominately civilians, were killed "in the ensuing massacres".

On 8 and 9 March, government-backed militias killed more than 100 people in the coastal city of Baniyas, Tartous governorate. Amnesty International documented at least 32 of these killings that were deliberate and targeted members of the Alawite community.³ Armed men asked people if they were Alawite before threatening or killing them, and, in some cases, blaming them for violations committed by the Assad government.

In August the UN Col reported that it had documented murder, torture, inhumane acts related to the treatment of the dead, large-scale looting, burning of homes, and other serious violations predominantly targeting the Alawite community in Latakia, Tartous and Hama that

were carried out by members of security and military forces, militias and “private individuals” working alongside or in proximity to government forces. The commission found that armed groups associated with the former Assad government also carried out serious abuses.

On 18 November a public trial began for suspects accused of carrying out the mass killings of Alawite civilians in Latakia and Tartous. The minister of justice told Amnesty International that an additional 80 suspects were in detention pending trial.

On 22 July the national fact-finding committee, established by the president on 9 March, presented its main findings and said it had identified 298 alleged perpetrators of crimes belonging to the military and security forces, as well as affiliated forces; and 265 alleged perpetrators belonging to armed groups affiliated with the former Assad government. Despite calls to do so, the government did not publish the report of the fact-finding committee.

Extrajudicial executions

In July, armed clashes between Druze and Bedouin fighters erupted in southern Syria. In response, on 15 July, government forces entered Suwayda city for 48 hours and imposed a curfew.

Amnesty International documented the deliberate shooting and killing by Syrian government forces and affiliated forces of 44 Druze men and two women in a public square, residential homes, a school, a hospital and a ceremonial hall in Suwayda, amounting to extrajudicial executions.⁴ Armed men in military uniforms filmed themselves killing at least 12 men by gunfire. CCTV footage from the National Hospital in Suwayda showed an armed man in military uniform, in the presence of other armed men and a general security officer, deliberately shooting and killing a medical worker.

On 31 July the minister of justice established an investigative committee into the events in Suwayda. However, by the end of the year, committee members had not yet been able to visit Suwayda city. On 2 September the Ministry of the Interior welcomed Amnesty International’s report on Suwayda and declared “its commitment to protecting all Syrians from all backgrounds”. In September and November, the committee spokesperson said that members of the security and military forces suspected of committing abuses in Suwayda had been referred to the judiciary.

Abuses by armed groups

Druze armed groups and Bedouin tribal fighters also committed serious abuses in Suwayda governorate, including abductions, unlawful killings and the burning of homes.

On 16 July the search-and-rescue humanitarian organization Syria Civil Defence dispatched Hamza al-Amareen, head of its Emergency Response Centre in Daraa, to Suwayda city in response to a UN call for assistance following clashes between Syrian government forces and

Druze armed groups that had erupted the previous day. Based on credible information received by his close relatives, Hamza al-Amareen was abducted by Druze-led armed groups while travelling in a car clearly marked as “Civil Defence” with a group of civilian evacuees. Witnesses reported that armed men took Hamza al-Amareen and his vehicle, while the other passengers were left at the roadside. His whereabouts and fate remained undisclosed at the end of the year.⁵

On 17 July, clashes resumed between Druze and Bedouin fighters. On 19 July, a ceasefire agreement was reached. During the fighting, thousands of Druze and Bedouin community members were displaced from their homes.

On 20 July the Syrian Arab Red Crescent reported “attacks targeting volunteers, an ambulance being shot at, and the burning of a warehouse and several parked vehicles” during armed clashes in Suwayda.

On 13 August, several humanitarian aid workers were abducted by Bedouin tribal fighters in Daraa while travelling to deliver aid in Suwayda. On 21 August the Ministry of the Interior announced it had located the abducted workers and secured their release.

Gender-based violence

Amnesty International documented the abduction of at least 36 Alawite women and girls, aged between three and 40 years, by unidentified armed men in Latakia, Tartous, Homs and Hama governorates.⁶ Some families were contacted by the abductors using Syrian or foreign telephone numbers, demanding ransom payments or threatening families if they continued searching for their loved ones. Ransom demands ranged from USD 10,000 to USD 14,000 and, even when paid, the captives were not released. At least two women, who were married at the time of their abduction, contacted their families to request a divorce from their husbands. They informed their families that they had been, or would be, forcibly married to their abductors.

In the majority of cases, police and security forces failed to conduct effective investigations. Some families of the missing who reported the abductions to the authorities said that their concerns were dismissed or that they were blamed for the disappearances.

On 3 November, the minister of the interior’s spokesperson announced the results of an internal investigation into the abductions. He stated that, of 42 reported cases, only one was confirmed as an abduction while the others involved disappearances for various reasons such as domestic abuse or elopement.

Right to a healthy environment

Syria experienced its lowest rainfall in three decades, triggering a severe drought that decreased wheat production by 40% and aggravated the humanitarian crisis resulting from 13 years of conflict that left more than half the population food insecure.

Farmers urged the government to rehabilitate agricultural infrastructure in key regions, promote drought-resistant crops, shift to less water-intensive farming and invest in sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture. The government did not appear to take any such steps during the year.

Occupied Golan Heights

The Golan Heights remained under Israel's occupation and illegal annexation. Following the ousting of former president Assad, the Israeli military constructed at least eight military bases and moved troops into the UN-demilitarized buffer zone that separated the 1967-occupied Golan Heights from the rest of Syria.

Residents in the UN-demilitarized buffer zone reported that Israeli military forces forcibly displaced residents, demolished homes, destroyed forests, prevented residents from reaching agricultural land, and arbitrarily detained residents, some of whom were transferred to Israel.

