

## STJ Submits Report to Damascus Governorate on Cases of Home Seizures and Arbitrary Evictions of Homeowners in Harasta



Efforts Must Be Made to Return Victims Whose Properties Were Illegally Seized to Their Homes with Their Families as Soon as Possible, Restore Their Looted Belongings, and Review Rental and Sale Contracts Conducted Between the Military Housing Establishment and Benefiting Military Personnel

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## Summary:

On 26 February 2025, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) submitted a report to the Damascus Governorate on a series of property rights violations and other related violations. This report comes in response to the complaint submission mechanism regarding cases of property seizure or encroachment on homes and residential properties [announced](#) by the Governorate on 12 February 2025.

To file complaints, those affected can contact the Damascus Governorate via the hotline (0994015989) to report cases of “witnessed home encroachment”, or by attending in person, either by homeowners or their representatives, at the Complaint Management Office located in the Damascus Governorate building, after first contacting the same number, to report cases of “witnessed home encroachment or other violations.” (see Annex 1).

STJ considers the announced mechanism an important and positive first step in addressing and combating property rights violations, which have been among the most common forms of violations under the former Syrian regime, and have been extensively documented by [local](#) and [international](#) human rights organizations.

Accordingly, STJ submitted a letter to the concerned officials in the Damascus Governorate to draw their attention to several violations, including the arbitrary eviction of families and the seizure of their homes, as well as the confiscation of household belongings of some properties, and the conversion of others to military or security headquarters.

These violations were committed by armed groups in two residential complexes in Harasta, Damascus Countryside, which were designated for army and police officers under the former regime. These complexes are known as “[al-Assad Suburb](#)” and “[Police Residences/Masaken al-Shurta](#).”

STJ managed to document eight cases in which families were evicted and their homes were seized in the aforementioned area. It also identified the homeowners by speaking with their family members and eyewitnesses.

The documented cases occurred on various dates after 8 December 2024, and were all arbitrary. The parties involved forcibly and arbitrarily evicted the families without prior notice and without presenting any court orders from a competent authority following due legal procedures. These evictions were accompanied by threats to the lives of family members. Additionally, seven homeowners were arrested and taken to unknown locations without legal warrants stating the reasons for their arrest, and they were forcibly disappeared.

## Recommendations:

Based on the information provided in the report, STJ recommends that the officials in the Damascus Governorate, along with other relevant bodies in the Syrian interim government, take the following actions:

1. Investigate the allegations of documented violations and hold those responsible accountable by conducting transparent public trials that uphold the principles of fair trials, in accordance with relevant international covenants and treaties.
2. Work towards returning victims whose properties were illegally seized to their homes along with their families as soon as possible, as well as restoring their looted belongings. Additionally, review and verify rental and sales contracts signed between the Military Housing Establishment and the military personnel benefiting from these contracts through specialized judicial committees to determine whether these contracts are genuine or fictitious.
3. Disclose the fate of the officers who were arrested without legal warrants and allow the Red Cross to visit them to assess their detention conditions. Additionally, permit their families to communicate with them and appoint lawyers on their behalf to ensure the legality of the investigations and the fairness of accountability procedures if they are referred to trial.

### Documented cases:

1. In al-Assad Suburbs, on 21 December, armed men raided the homes of retired officers (Kh.A.), (M.A.), and (A.Gh.), arrested them, and evicted their families from their homes. The armed men took the officers to an unknown location, while others seized their homes and belongings, converting them into military and security locations. Before leaving, one of the armed individuals threatened the officers' wives to "execute their children if they did not leave the area entirely." This is according to an eyewitness who spoke to STJ online on 24 December 2024. The witness requested to remain anonymous for security reasons.
2. In al-Assad Suburbs, on 17 December, armed men raided the home of (M.A.), an administrative officer in the Military Recruitment Division in Qaboun, arresting him and taking him to an unknown location on charges of working at Sednaya Prison. The leader of the raiding group declared that the house now belonged to him. This is according to the officer's relative who spoke to STJ online on 26 December 2024, who requested to remain anonymous for security reasons.
3. In the Police Residences, on 16 December, armed men raided the home of (A.S.), a retired officer from Hama, and turned it into a military headquarters after removing its contents and stealing the family's money and jewelry. The leader of the armed group released the officer following the intervention of several civilians, but later forced him and his family to leave the area on a bus that was with them. This is according to an eyewitness who spoke to STJ online on 24 December 2024, and requested to remain anonymous for security reasons.
4. In the Police Residences, on 15 December, armed men raided the home of (A.A.), a lieutenant in the Damascus Traffic Police branch from Arbin, Damascus Countryside. The armed men arrested him and took him to an unknown location after the leader of the raiding group forced the officer's wife and children out of the house, and ordered it to be sealed. When the officer's sister tried to defend her brother, the group's leader threatened to "arrest and execute her." This is according to the officer's relative who

spoke to STJ online on 27 December 2024, and requested to remain anonymous for security reasons.

5. Also in the Police Residences, in mid-December 2024, a large armed group raided the homes of officers (S.A.) and (H.A.), both from the Alawite sect and originally from Tartous governorate. They were arrested and taken to an unknown location. (H.A.) was beaten “with a rifle butt until his head started bleeding,” while his wife and children were forced out of their home, their belongings were thrown into the street, and the house was later set on fire. The armed men emptied all homes belonging to officers who had fled the area. On 20 December, another armed group entered the residential complex and converted the emptied houses into military headquarters. This is according to an eyewitness who spoke to STJ online on 27 December 2024, and requested to remain anonymous for security reasons.

It is worth noting that since the 1960s, Harasta city has witnessed large-scale land [expropriations by the Syrian government](#), where confiscated agricultural lands were used to establish security centers, military bases, as well as suburbs and residential complexes for security, army, and police personnel, including al-Assad Suburb, as reported by Syria Report. The Suburb is considered the largest example of a government-supported homeownership program under the [military housing system](#), through which officers were able to purchase homes at moderate prices and on an installment basis in residential areas managed by the military.

### Legal Commentary and Opinion:

The documented actions carried out by armed groups in the aforementioned incidents do not comply with numerous international covenants and treaties and constitute a clear violation of them, as well as Syrian laws, which are presumed to remain in force as long as they have not been replaced by other laws or explicitly and legally repealed:

#### ❖ According to International Laws:

The right to property and adequate housing are fundamental human rights. Therefore, no one may be arbitrarily deprived of their property as stipulated in Articles 17 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 17 and 11 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The armed elements’ seizure of homes and looting of their contents constitutes a clear violation of the aforementioned articles, as there was no judicial order justifying the evictions or confiscations.

Moreover, the degrading treatment suffered by those whose homes and properties were seized contradicts the human right not to be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, in accordance with Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of 1984. Additionally, these actions violate the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their two Additional Protocols of 1977.

Forcing the families of officers whose homes and properties were seized to leave the area they live in against their will, without legal justification, using threats, force, or violence, as reported by witnesses interviewed for this report, constitutes the crime of forced displacement, which is prohibited under Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, and Article 17 of the Second Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 1977. Furthermore, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court classifies forced displacement as a war crime.

The forces responsible for these violations cannot justify their actions by claiming that the targeted individuals were military personnel, as they were unarmed, and showed no intent to resist or engage in combat. On the contrary, some of them had surrendered their weapons to the relevant authorities under “settlement” agreements. Thus, they were no longer combatants and are entitled to the protections granted under Common Article 3 of the Four Geneva Conventions of 1949, which states that “Persons taking no active part in hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those incapacitated by sickness, wounds, detention, or other causes, shall be treated humanely without discrimination.” Furthermore, any act aiming at arbitrarily confiscating the property of protected persons is prohibited under Article 46 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

#### ❖ According to Syrian legislation:

Under Article 2 of [Decree No. 12 of 1975 establishing the Military Housing Establishment](#), the mission of this Establishment is to construct housing and either rent or sell it to military personnel. Accordingly, the persons who were evicted were either tenants or owners of these properties, whether from the Military Housing Establishment or from military personnel who had acquired them through purchase from the Establishment, as the property owners have the right to sell their property to others after three years of fully paying its value (as stipulated in Article 22 of the Decree).

According to Syrian legislation, property rights grant the owner full authority over the owned asset, including the right to dispose of, use, and benefit from it. No one may be deprived of their property except in cases determined by law, and provided that fair compensation is given (Articles 768 and 771 of the Syrian Civil Code No. 84 of 1949). Additionally, if the occupant of the property is a tenant, the lease contract entitles them to benefit from the rented property in exchange for a specified rent (Article 526 of the Civil Code).

The seizure of another person’s property without legal basis, as carried out by armed elements after 8 December 2024, according to what was stated in this report, constitutes the crime of property usurpation under Article 723 of the Syrian Penal Code, issued by Legislative Decree No. 148 of 1949. The perpetrator is punishable by imprisonment for up to six months, and the penalty may extend to one year if the crime is accompanied by threats or coercion. However, if the crime is committed by two or more armed individuals, which was the case in the documented seizures stated in this report, the imprisonment penalty may reach up to three years.

As for taking and seizing household movables without right, this falls within the definition of theft contained in Article 621 of the Penal Code. If the theft is accompanied by violence

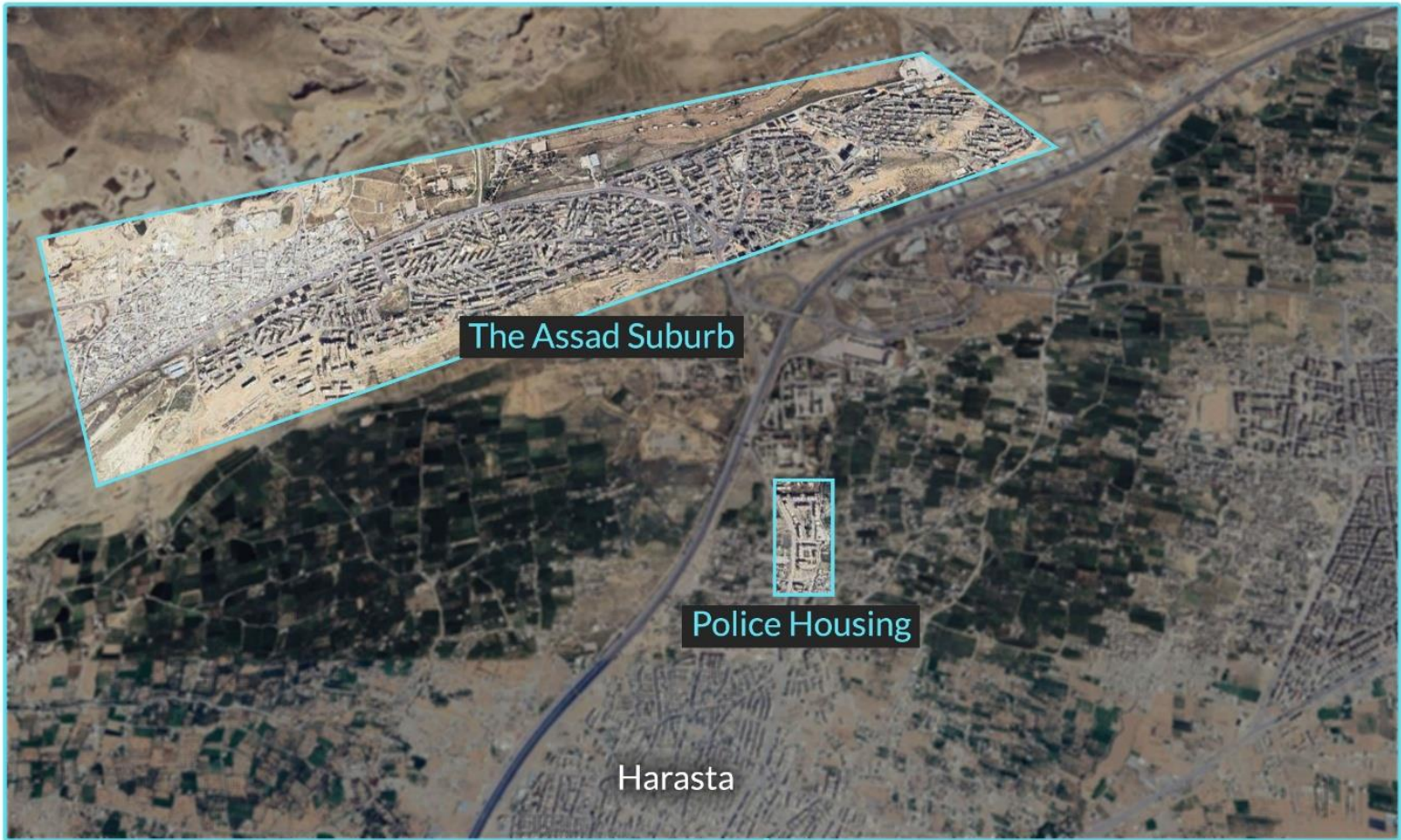
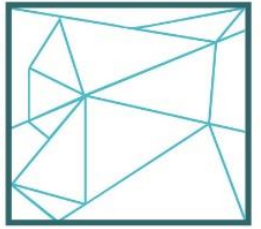


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against persons, the penalty shall be temporary hard labor from 3 to 15 years. If the perpetrator is carrying a visible weapon, or if the theft takes place in an inhabited house, the penalty shall be temporary hard labor from 5 to 20 years (Articles 624-625 of the General Penal Code).

Below is a map designed by Syrians for Truth and Justice showing the location of the two residential complexes, Police Residences and al-Assad Suburb, in the city of Harasta in Damascus countryside:







Annex 1: A copy of the reporting mechanism regarding the seizure or encroachment on homes and residential properties announced by the Damascus Governorate on 12 February 2025:



الجمهورية العربية السورية  
وزارة الإدارة المحلية والبيئة  
محافظة دمشق

رقم: 16/س/2  
تاريخ: 12/2/2025

### بلاغ من محافظة دمشق

بشأن المحرّزات السكنية أو التعديت الواقعة عليها

حرصاً من محافظة دمشق على حماية حقوق المواطنين والحفاظ على الممتلكات الخاصة، تُعلن عن بدء استقبال الشكاوى المتعلقة بوضع اليد أو التعدي على المنازل والعقارات السكنية من خلال القنوات الآتية:  
قنوات تقديم الشكاوى:  
1. الرقم الساخن:

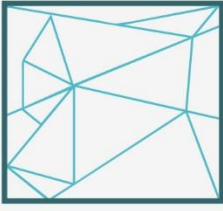
- تخصيص الرقم (0994015989) لاستقبال الشكاوى المستعجلة الخاصة بالتعدي المشهود على المنازل.
- يُرجى من المواطنين تقديم المعلومات التالية عند الاتصال:
  - الاسم الكامل ورقم الهاتف وصفة المشتكي وعلاقته بالعقار
  - العنوان التفصيلي للعقار المتعدى عليه (مع إمكانية إرسال إحدائيات الموقع عبر تطبيقات الهاتف).
  - وصف وضع اليد أو التعدي (نوعه، وتوقيته، والجهة..).
  - أي مستندات أو دلائل تدعم الشكاوى (صور، فيديو، أو سندات ملكية).

2. الحضور الشخصي إلى مكتب الشكاوى لاستقبال الشكاوى المتعلقة بالمنازل، سواء التعدي المشهود أو غيره وذلك بعد التواصل على الرقم أعلاه:

- يتم استقبال الشكاوى من الأصيل أو الوكيل الرسمي في مقر مكتب إدارة الشكاوى داخل مبنى محافظة دمشق، خلال أوقات الدوام الرسمي لمتابعتها أصولاً بعد أخذ البيانات اللازمة وفق الفورم المحدد.

تؤكد محافظة دمشق التزامها بحماية حقوق المواطنين ومعالجة هذه الشكاوى، نهيى بجميع المتضررين التوجه للإبلاغ على الفور لضمان سرعة الاستجابة.

محافظة دمشق  
محافظة دمشق  
ماهر محمد مروان



## ABOUT STJ

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) started as an idea in a co-founder's mind while attending the U.S. Middle-East Partnership Initiative's (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program (LDF) in 2015. The idea became a reality and flourished into an independent, non-profit, impartial, non-governmental human rights organization.

STJ's beginnings were more than humble; initially, it only reported stories of Syrians who experienced arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, or torture. Planted in fertile soil, the seed of this project grew into an established human rights organization licensed in the Middle East and the European Union. STJ today undertakes to detect and uncover violations of all types committed in all Syrian parts by the various parties to the conflict.

Convinced that Syria's diversity is a wealth, our researchers and volunteers serve with unfailing dedication to monitor, expose, and document human rights violations that continue unabated in Syria since 2011, regardless of the affiliation of the victims or perpetrators.

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the  
Netherlands

