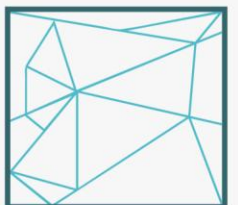


## Syria: Serious Concerns Regarding Integrity, Independence, and Effectiveness of the Investigation Committee for Coastal Events



The committee should publicly share its findings and recommendations, engage victims in the investigation process, and collaborate with UN agencies and Syrian civil society organizations



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## **Syria: Serious Concerns Regarding Integrity, Independence, and Effectiveness of the Investigation Committee for Coastal Events**

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## 1. Introduction

On 4 March 2025, an armed group [labeled](#) by the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) as belonging to “remnants of pro-Assad militias” targeted a General Security Administration patrol of the new Syrian regime at a roundabout in the predominantly Alawite al-Azhari neighborhood of Latakia, killing two. This neighborhood is about 2 km from the al-Da’tour neighborhood, where one of the militants reportedly fled.

In response to the attack, the new authorities launched a large-scale security campaign in al-Da’tour and several surrounding neighborhoods, according to SANA.<sup>1</sup> Social media posts accompanied this response, depicting the destruction of homes, civilian casualties, and an arrest campaign targeting several men, including one child. The child was later released after residents pressured the authorities, as reported by a local source.

Other posts criticized how the security forces managed the situation. After the neighborhood was stormed, some labeled the security forces as “terrorists,” while others questioned, “What’s the difference between them and Bashar al-Assad’s regime?”<sup>2</sup> The siege and armed clashes persisted for several hours, concluding with the arrest of multiple individuals and reports of civilian deaths during military operations that SANA described as “neutralization” operations.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to note that these events coincided with the spread of misleading information regarding the number of civilian deaths during the security campaign. Syrian media outlets did not refute the reports of civilian casualties and injuries during this campaign.<sup>4</sup> However, direct testimonies from residents of the targeted neighborhood, collected by Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) through its researchers, indicated that the operation involved random arrests and indiscriminate firing at civilian homes and properties, resulting in the deaths of several residents, including a child. Moreover, the campaign was marked by sectarian rhetoric and intense hate speech directed against the Alawite sect. The incidents, referred to as the “al-Datour events”, occurred in a neighborhood mainly inhabited by Alawites. They followed two days of heightened tensions in the Druze-majority Jaramana neighborhood of Damascus, where conflicts emerged between residents and security personnel associated with the transitional

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<sup>1</sup> [“Internal Security Administration launches a Large-Scale Security Campaign in Latakia’s al-Da’tour Neighborhood”](#) (in Arabic), SANA, 4 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

<sup>2</sup> [“Latakia Events Spark Anger and Questions... Syrians Say ‘The Regime has not Fallen’](#)” (in Arabic), Alhurra, 4 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

<sup>3</sup> [“General Security Detained Remnants of The Former Regime and Neutralized Others in Lattakia’s Da’tour Neighborhood Following the Targeting of Two Ministry of Defense Personnel”](#) (in Arabic), SANA, 5 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

<sup>4</sup> For instance, the news regarding the death of the child Hadi Ali Ibrahim was later confirmed to be false, as reported by the [Verify](#) (Arabic: Ta’kad) platform on the night of 4 March 2025. (Last accessed: 1 April 2025).

authority in Damascus. This situation was resolved "peacefully" with the cooperation of local notables.<sup>5</sup> These events coincided with the arrival of transitional President Ahmed al-Sharaa and his foreign minister in Egypt to attend the extraordinary Arab Summit, commonly known as the "Palestine's Summit".<sup>6</sup>

On 5 March 2025, the city of al-Sanamayn, primarily populated by a Sunni Muslim majority in Daraa Governorate in southern Syria, witnessed clashes between General Security forces and an armed group associated with the former Assad regime, led by Mohsen al-Haymad. These clashes were sparked by rising tensions, particularly after attacks on General Security personnel in the city by the al-Haymad group, akin to incidents that had transpired in Latakia.<sup>7</sup> In response, transitional authorities sent reinforcements to the city and launched a military campaign against the group. Over two days, the fighting resulted in the deaths and captures of dozens of al-Haymad group members along with some civilian casualties. The group's leader and several others managed to flee to an unknown location, and the military operation was eventually declared over.<sup>8</sup>

It is noteworthy that during the al-Sanamayn events, the General Security Forces temporarily halted the clashes and set a deadline to ensure the evacuation of civilians from the neighborhood where the Mohsen al-Haymad group had taken up arms prior to resuming fighting. This decision facilitated the evacuation of civilians, including women and children, from areas affected by military confrontations, thereby protecting many lives.<sup>9</sup> The General Security Forces emphasized their caution in managing the situation due to the presence of civilians.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, no videos promoting sectarian hate speech were identified during the clashes in al-Sanamayn. In contrast, such measures were not observed during the clashes in the predominantly Alawite neighborhood of al-Da'tour in Latakia, which led to the deaths of at least four civilians, including one child.<sup>11</sup> The Syrian transitional administration forces employed medium-range weapons and drones during these clashes,<sup>12</sup> which were accompanied by hate speech and sectarian rhetoric directed against Alawites.

<sup>5</sup> [Al-Da'tour Neighborhood in the Grip of Tension, with Random Gunfire and Residents' Movement Restricted](#)" (in Arabic); [Footage of security forces entering the al-Da'tour neighborhood in Latakia](#), Snack Syrian, 4 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

<sup>6</sup> ["President al-Sharaa arrives in Cairo to attend Extraordinary Arab Summit on developments in Palestine"](#), SANA, 4 March 2025, (last accessed 1 April 2025).

<sup>7</sup> [Horan Free League](#), 6 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

<sup>8</sup> ["What Happened in al-Sanamayn, Daraa countryside?"](#) (In Arabic), Aljazeera Net, 6 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

<sup>9</sup> [Horan Free League](#), 5 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

<sup>10</sup> ["What Happened in al-Sanamayn, Daraa countryside?"](#) (In Arabic), Aljazeera Net, 6 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

<sup>11</sup> ["Syrian Observatory: Civilians Killed in Security Operation in Former Assad Stronghold"](#) (In Arabic), DW, 5 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

<sup>12</sup> [Al-Da'tour Neighborhood in the Grip of Tension, with Random Gunfire and Residents' Movement Restricted](#)" (in Arabic); [Footage of security forces entering the al-Da'tour neighborhood in Latakia](#), Snack Syrian, 4 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

What happened on 6 March 2025 ignited a crisis known as the “Syrian Coast Events.” On that day, the Military Operations Administration announced the launch of a large-scale military and security campaign targeting what they referred to as “regime remnants” in the governorates of Homs, Latakia, and Tartous. A curfew was reimposed in the Latakia and Tartous governorates following clashes that erupted in the city of Jableh and various coastal villages. This unrest was triggered by the killing of over 15 members of the General Security Service in [coordinated](#) ambushes carried out by gunmen linked to the former Syrian regime. STJ’s field researcher reported that a General Security patrol was ambushed while attempting to arrest several individuals in the village of [Ad Dali](#) in the Jableh countryside. An ambulance attempting to evacuate the wounded was also [targeted](#) during the chaos. Clashes erupted as additional military reinforcements arrived from the General Security Forces. Military helicopters belonging to the transitional authority in Damascus actively participated in the incident, [bombing](#) locations in the nearby villages of Beit Ana and Ad Dali, according to video footage verified by STJ. Following these events, a flight believed to be from a [Russian](#) aircraft occurred over the area; the precise reason for this flight remains unclear.

Dozens of civilians demonstrated in the city of Tartous and the al-Da’tour neighborhood in Latakia following the events of that day. The Supreme Alawite Islamic Council in Syria and Abroad released a [statement](#) stating: “Violations have escalated, and individuals have acted without any discipline, attacking the property of innocent people and shouting sectarian slogans in public. This behavior has been documented through audio and video recordings. These actions coincide with campaigns of intimidation and killings that have not spared even civilians or children.” The statement called for an immediate halt to the military campaign.

As a result of the fighting that day, approximately 70 people were killed, most of whom were members of the Syrian security forces and militants loyal to the ousted president, Bashar al-Assad, during what was described as “unprecedented” clashes, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR).<sup>13</sup> That evening, a statement was issued, announcing the “[establishment and launch of the Military Council for the Liberation of Syria](#).”<sup>14</sup> This statement was signed by Brigadier General Ghiath Suleiman Dalla, a former commander in the Fourth Division of the previous regime’s army. The statement called for “the overthrow of the existing regime” and “the liberation of all Syrian territory from the occupying terrorist forces,” as it stated. (See Appendix 1).

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<sup>13</sup> “Syrian Authorities Reimpose Curfews in Tartous and Latakia as Security Operations Continue in the Two Cities”, BBC, 7 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

<sup>14</sup> STJ could not verify the statement.

This situation coincided with the publication of a report by Al-Jumhuriya Net, which claimed that Khaldoun al-Hajri, a relative of the religious leader in As Suwayda, Hikmat al-Hajri, and his representative abroad, met with American officials in Washington last February. He attended in his role as Sheikh Hikmat al-Hajri's political representative and presented them with a plan to initiate an armed rebellion against the government of Ahmed al-Sharaa. This rebellion would be led by forces affiliated with Hikmat al-Hajri from As Suwayda, with participation from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in eastern Syria and Alawite groups from the Syrian coast, along with support from Israel.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, rumors and unverified reports began to circulate, as reported by the Qatari channel Al Jazeera, indicating that deposed President Bashar al-Assad is aware of the ongoing coordination among various armed groups, with the support and oversight of a foreign nation.<sup>16</sup> Al Jazeera mentioned that it had obtained information concerning the link between Bashar and Maher al-Assad and the current events, without identifying the source or offering any additional references. This has undoubtedly complicated the situation.

All these news reports, events, and statements, both true and false, have led to unprecedented popular and sectarian tension across Syria, especially among Sunnis and in Sunni Muslim-majority regions and governorates. Many perceive these events as a "coup attempt" and "rebellion" against the new authorities led by Ahmad al-Sharaa, initiated by supporters of former President Bashar al-Assad. Demonstrations in support of the military operation on the Syrian coast have erupted in dozens of cities, with protesters expressing their willingness to join the ongoing battles in that region. This has coincided with widespread and unprecedented calls for general mobilization in several areas of Syria.<sup>17</sup> Hate speech and incitement to violence have become alarmingly common on social media,<sup>18</sup> including public demands to kill Alawites and dispose of their bodies in the sea, so that it cannot be said that "fish have starved in the seas of

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<sup>15</sup> ["How the Situation Exploded from Jaramana to the Region"](#) (in Arabic), Al-Jumhuriya Net, 6 March 2025, (last accessed 1 April 2025).

<sup>16</sup> ["Demonstrations Sweep Syrian Cities and New Information about Bashar and Maher Al-Assad's Relationship to the Events"](#) (in Arabic), Al Jazeera Net, 7 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

<sup>17</sup> ["Jableh, Syria: General Mobilization Against the Remnants of the Regime and their Deaths in Dozens,"](#) Jamil al-Hassan's YouTube channel, 6 March 2025, (last accessed 1 April 2025);

See also: ["General Mobilization Throughout Syria Against the Remnants of the Regime in Jableh, Tartous, and Latakia"](#), Abu Dujana bin Ghiyath YouTube channel, 6 March 2025, (last accessed 1 April 2025).

Also: ["Friday Sermon at the Grand Al-Maliha Mosque By Sheikh Al-Hafiz Al-Jami' Abu Asim Othman Al-Dabbas Regarding the Coastal Events"](#), 7 March 2025, (last accessed 1 April 2025).

<sup>18</sup> [Video 1](#), [video 2](#), [video 3](#), [video 4](#).



the Umayyads”. Such rhetoric has also resonated in some mosques,<sup>19</sup> alongside calls for jihad from others.<sup>20</sup>

Despite this alarming situation, the Syrian transitional authorities have not taken significant action to combat these incitements or manage their consequences. Although the [Military Operations Administration](#) later stated its Telegram channel asserting that “the state does not need men to fight in its ranks or to declare a state of emergency in mosques,” Ahmed al-Sharaa delivered a [speech](#) (04:11 minutes long), on the evening of 7 March 2025, emphasizing that “in Syria today, there is no distinction between the government and the people. Syria concerns everyone, and it is everyone’s mission to preserve and support it.” This statement clearly endorsed the “general mobilization” efforts in numerous Syrian regions.

Addressing the “remnants of the regime,” al-Sharaa noted that they had “shed Syrian blood for decades.” He further pointed out that the new authorities had previously granted “amnesty” to prevent the current situation, suggesting that this speech marked the end of that amnesty. In the same address, President al-Sharaa commended the army and security forces for their “commitment to protecting and securing civilians while pursuing the remnants of the regime,” emphasizing the need to avoid exaggeration and overreach in their “reaction.” He also warned of “severe accountability” for anyone who attacks unarmed civilians or punishes people for “the sins of others”.

Starting on 7 March 2025, a military security campaign unfolded in Homs and its surrounding areas, including the countryside of Hama and the cities and villages along the Syrian coast. Numerous videos and testimonies emerged, detailing mass killings, indiscriminate violence, humiliation, insults, abuse, hate speech, and widespread sectarian rhetoric targeting civilians in these regions, particularly members of the Alawite sect. STJ managed to verify the authenticity of many videos documenting these atrocities and compiled a list of hundreds of civilian victims, along with numerous exclusive testimonies. The violations were not limited to Alawite sect members; they also affected individuals from the Murshidi sect, including an attack on their religious shrine in the village of Karm al-Ma’asara, located in the al-Haffa area of the Latakia countryside.

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<sup>19</sup> Sheikh Mohsen Ghosn's YouTube channel, [video](#) published on 7 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025);

See also: “[Idlib Mosques Call for General Mobilization and Convoys from All Governorates Head to the Coast](#)”, Misk Media, 6 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

<sup>20</sup> “New Death Toll from the Massacres on the Syrian Coast”, Alhurra TV website, 12 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025), the channel quoted the news of the calls for jihad from Reuters, according to the text of the news, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).



Numerous videos have been circulated, showing fighters affiliated with the Syrian transitional government forces committing massacres and vandalizing religious sites that are sacred to the Alawite sect in Syria.<sup>21</sup> Members of the Coastal Shield Brigade, linked to the former Assad regime, continue to threaten the new Syrian authorities, expressing their determination to persist in fighting. They are also inciting coastal residents to target the forces of the Military Operations Administration.<sup>22</sup> These calls for action have coincided with the widespread dissemination of misleading information about the situation on the ground<sup>23</sup>.

## 2. Background

Following Operation Deterrence of Aggression, launched on 27 November 2024 by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and other armed factions, and resulted in the collapse of the Assad regime on 8 December 2024, the Military Operations Administration publicly stated its intention to "prevent revenge operations" in Syria by announcing a [general amnesty for all military personnel conscripted under compulsory service](#) in the Assad regime's forces.

Military Operations Commander Ahmed al-Sharaa [stated](#), "the revolution is over," and described the victory as "a conquest in which there is no revenge, but rather love and mercy." In subsequent [interviews](#) with Arab media outlets, he emphasized that "the mentality of revolution and revenge is useless during the state-building phase," a statement reflecting the Syrian transitional government's desire to "turn the page on the past." These statements ignited controversy among Syrians, as some demanded "immediate retribution" for war criminals from the former regime's forces and others [advocated](#) for a clear and transparent process to guarantee transitional justice and prevent arbitrary acts of revenge.

In December 2023, January 2024, and February 2025, there was a significant increase in violence and human rights violations against Syrian civilians from the Alawite sect in the governorates of Homs, Latakia, and Tartous. Human rights reports documented several [extrajudicial killings](#), including a mass killing in the village of Fahel in the Homs countryside on

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<sup>21</sup> [Link 1](#), [link 2](#);

see also: "[On the Events on the Syrian Coast: The Country is a Time Bomb With no Clear Timer](#)" (in Arabic), BBC, 15 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

<sup>22</sup> "[Muqdad Fatiha Threatens the New Syrian Administration in a Video](#)", Sky News Arabia, 13 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025);

see also: Video posted on the [Coastal Shield Brigade's](#) Facebook page, 11 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

<sup>23</sup> "[How Rumors and Misinformation Contributed to Fueling Tensions on the Syrian Coast?](#)" (in Arabic), BBC, 22 March 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

23 January 2025,<sup>24</sup> which resulted in 15 deaths, including those of civilians. Reports also noted the killings of [three judges](#) and several prominent [religious](#) and [social](#) figures from the Alawite community. Additionally, attacks on [cemeteries](#) have been documented, along with [arrests](#) and the [mistreatment](#) of detainees. Some detainees were even [forced to imitate dog sounds](#) or shout derogatory phrases. This rise in violence corresponds with the increasingly complex local and regional situation in Syria. On 3 March 2025, the [Iranian Mehr News Agency](#) released a statement from the [Islamic Resistance Front in Syria - Uli al-Baas](#), urging Syrians to “revolt against falsehood.” STJ noted the emergence of several new social media pages and accounts named Popular Resistance, Coastal Shield Brigade, and Coastal Shield Support Group during February and early March 2025<sup>25</sup>.

This coincided with the release of [provocative videos](#) by Muqdad Fatiha,<sup>26</sup> a former army officer loyal to Assad, in which he threatened to conduct operations against the new Syrian authorities. He encouraged people to “carry weapons and not surrender them” to the new government, urging them to target security forces and their checkpoints<sup>27</sup>.

### 3. Mass Killings and Displacement Statistics

On 9 March 2025, the [Military Operations Administration](#) reported the deaths of 231 fighters in coastal battles. Two days later, on 11 March 2025, the [Syrian Network for Human Rights \(SNHR\)](#) issued a report indicating that it had documented the killings of at least 803 individuals during the period from 6 to 10 March 2025 .

The SNHR also reported that at least 172 members of the security forces, police, and military, as well as more than 211 civilians, have died at the hands of groups described as “armed groups outside the framework of the state linked to the Assad regime”. Additionally, the SNHR reported the deaths of at least 420 unarmed fighters and civilians, including 39 children, 49 women, and 27 medical personnel, caused by forces loyal to the transitional authorities in Damascus.

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<sup>24</sup> “[The Fahl Massacre... The Full Account of What Happened from Thursday to Saturday](#)” (in Arabic), Snack Syrian, 26 January 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025);

see also: “[New Toll from the Fahl Massacre, 16 People Killed, including Officers of Former Regime](#)” (in Arabic), SOHR, 27 January 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025);

also: “[Asharq News Meets with Residents of Fahl Village, Homs](#)”, Asharq News, 31 January 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

<sup>25</sup> See: [Popular Resistance Mountain Battalion, Al-Yushu Battalion Coastal Shield Brigade \(Al-Yushu\), Coastal Shield Brigade, Coastal Shield Support Group 313, Muqdad Fatiha Coastal Shield Brigade Official](#), (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

<sup>26</sup> Muqdad Fatiha, a former Republican Guard officer, is [accused](#) of committing war crimes while participating in military operations with Syrian regime forces. Several [videos](#) of his crimes have circulated even before the fall of the former regime, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

<sup>27</sup> [Radio Taif](#), 6 February 2025, (last accessed: 1 April 2025).

On 22 March, the [SOHR](#) reported that it had documented 62 massacres on the Syrian coast, leading to the deaths of 1,614 civilians. Meanwhile, the [Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression \(SCM\)](#) released statistics for victims killed between 6 and 10 March: 1,169 civilian casualties, including 732 in Latakia, 276 in Tartus, and 161 in Hama. Among the victims were 103 women and 52 children (43 boys and nine girls). Additionally, the SCM reported 218 deaths among the members of the General Security of the new regime.

Mazen Darwish, head of the SCM and a Syrian human rights activist, noted that while it is difficult to pinpoint those directly responsible for the violations due to the complex situation and the various parties involved, there are indications of government personnel's involvement in the killings and violence based on the information available.

The independent Syrian Civil Peace Group -Seen also released its latest statistics on 29 March 2025, [documenting](#) the deaths of 1,743 civilians on the Syrian coast during the period from 6 to 10 March 2025. As a result of clashes and military operations, thousands of families have been displaced from villages and cities along the coast. More than 8,000 individuals, including women and children, have sought refuge at the Khmeimim Air Base (also known as Hmeimim Air Base) in Latakia Governorate, according to the [Russian News Agency TASS](#). Furthermore, the Lebanese newspaper [An-Nahar](#) reported that the Disaster and Crisis Management Room in Akkar Governorate, Lebanon, stated that border villages in the northern part of the governorate have welcomed 15,771 displaced persons from Syria due to recent events.

On 9 March 2025, a [joint statement](#) was issued by Acting UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide Virginia Gamba and UN Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect Mô Bleeker. The statement confirmed that "The reports emerging from Latakia and Tartous paint a harrowing picture of targeted attacks, including against members of the Alawite community, in a reaction to a series of coordinated attacks reportedly launched by elements of the former government and other local armed men." For its part, Human Rights Watch (HRW) [reported](#) that, "Summary executions and other atrocities have taken place in Syria's coastal region following insurgent attacks on Syrian security forces and during subsequent government security operations." Amnesty International, in turn, [urged](#) an investigation into what it termed the "horrific killings of civilians on the northwest coast" of Syria. This statement follows reports indicating that hundreds of civilians, mainly from the Alawite minority, were killed in coastal regions. On 25 March 2025, Geir Pedersen, the UN Special Envoy for Syria, [briefed](#) the UN Security Council, expressing his deep concern about reports of clashes along the Syrian coast and the resulting civilian casualties. He urged all parties involved to exercise maximum restraint

and ensure the protection of civilians in accordance with international law. Additionally, he highlighted troubling reports of widespread extrajudicial killings and serious sectarian and retaliatory violations, particularly targeting members of the Alawite community.

#### 4. Measures of the Syrian Transitional Government

The Syrian transitional authorities acknowledged that violations occurred during the military campaign. On 7 March 2025, a [security source](#) from the Ministry of Interior informed SANA that what he referred to as “some individual violations” had taken place. He attributed these violations to “large, unorganized crowds of people headed to the coast” in support of the security forces and the Ministry of Defense. These crowds were the same groups that responded to calls for “general mobilization”, which Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa praised in his initial speech on 7 March 2025.

On 9 March 2025, just two days after the declaration of a “general mobilization” and the mass killings driven by sectarian divisions on the Syrian coast, Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa delivered a second [speech](#). In this address, he announced the formation of a [national committee](#) tasked with investigating and uncovering the facts surrounding the events on the Syrian coast that took place on 6 March 2025. He stated that various parties had infiltrated the region and acknowledged that “violations” had occurred. However, he did not address the allegations concerning his security forces’ involvement in these mass killings, extrajudicial executions, or other serious violations, such as the looting and destruction of property and essential livelihoods for the civilian population.

The committee’s tasks were defined as follows:

1. **Uncover the circumstances and conditions that led to these events. (Article 2.1)**
2. **Investigate violations against civilians and identify those responsible. (Article 2.2)**
3. **Examine attacks on public institutions, security personnel, and the army, and identify those accountable for these attacks. (Article 2.3)**
4. **Refer individuals found to be involved in committing crimes and violations to the judiciary. (Article 2.4).**

The committee is composed of seven members: Judge [Jumaa al-Dubais al-Anizi](#), Judge [Khaled Adwan al-Helou](#), Judge [Ali al-Naasan](#), Judge [Alaa al-Din Yousef Latif](#), Judge [Hanadi Abu Arab](#), Brigadier General [Awad Ahmed al-Ali](#), and lawyer [Yasser Tawfiq al-Farhan](#). (See Appendix 2).

Although the commission was established based on a decision from the president with no reference to the body of law that governs it, international law stipulates the principles such national commissions need to follow for the investigation to be deemed effective. These principles are present in both international human rights law and international humanitarian law, both of which apply in this case. For instance, the Human Rights Committee determined that states had an implied “duty to investigate in good faith all allegations of violations of the Covenant made against it and its authorities”.<sup>28</sup>

The [Committee states in its General Comment No. 36](#) on Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on the right to life: “An important element of the protection afforded to the right to life by the Covenant is the obligation on the States parties, where they know or should have known of potentially unlawful deprivations of life, to investigate and, where appropriate, prosecute the perpetrators of such incidents, including incidents involving allegations of excessive use of force with lethal consequences... Investigations and prosecutions of potentially unlawful deprivations of life .... must be aimed at ensuring that those responsible are brought to justice, at promoting accountability and preventing impunity, at avoiding denial of justice and at drawing necessary lessons for revising practices and policies with a view to avoiding repeated violations. Investigations should explore, inter alia, the legal responsibility of superior officials with regard to violations of the right to life committed by their subordinates...”<sup>29</sup> The committee further establishes that: “Investigations into allegations of violations of article 6 must always be independent, impartial, prompt, thorough, effective, credible and transparent”.<sup>30</sup> Investigations into possible violations of international humanitarian law are recognized as critical for the proper application of this body of norms in both international and non-international armed conflict. Any form of investigation must be effective insofar as it should be capable of (1) enabling a determination of whether there was a violation of international humanitarian law, (2) identifying the individual and systemic factors that caused or contributed to an incident, and (3) laying the ground for any remedial action that may be required. The principles most commonly required for the effectiveness of an investigation are: independence, impartiality, thoroughness, promptness, and transparency.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Bleier v. Uruguay, Communication No. 30/1978, UN Doc CCPR/C/15/D/30/1978, 29 March 1982, para. 13.3.

<sup>29</sup> General Comment No. 36 on article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on the right to life” (10 October 2018), CCPR/C/GC/36, paras 27.

<sup>30</sup> General Comment No. 36 on article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on the right to life” (10 October 2018), CCPR/C/GC/36, paras 28.

<sup>31</sup> Noam Lubell, Jelena Pejic and Claire Simmons. Guidelines on Investigating Violations of International Humanitarian Law: Law, Policy, and Good Practice. 2019.

Based on the above, STJ believes that the committee's formation by the Republic's presidency and its methods of operation raise significant concerns about the transitional authorities' commitment to achieving justice. Doubts persist regarding the integrity and transparency of the investigations.

#### 4.1. Regarding the committee's establishment, independence and the authority's good faith

This committee was established not by an independent legislative body or a supreme judicial authority, but rather by the presidency (the executive authority), which Amnesty International has confirmed oversees the militias responsible for the violations.<sup>32</sup> This raises questions about the committee's actual independence. It is unlikely that a committee formed by the executive authority will produce a report that undermines the interests of the entity that created it, as outlined in Article 1 of the decision to form the committee. Furthermore, the involvement of a former military and security figure, who [contributed](#) to the Syrian conflict by forming an armed faction, as a member of the committee raises additional concerns about its impartiality, as well as that of several other members during the investigation process. This situation may contradict the principles outlined in international law, which state that investigation committees should be independent and impartial.

It is important to note that the fact-finding committee established to investigate the events on the Syrian coast has a limited number of independent members. This is in contrast to several members who are directly affiliated with the Salvation Government, which is linked to HTS in northwestern Syria, or with the Syrian Interim Government (SIG), which has ties to the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) and receives support from Türkiye. STJ believes that the selection and appointment process for committee members fails to meet the requirement of impartiality. As a result, there are serious concerns that the majority of the committee may be biased towards the narrative presented by the official authorities rather than genuinely seeking the truth in an impartial, fair, and objective manner.

STJ also believes that the committee's membership should consist of fully independent investigators from diverse Syrian regions, including the Syrian coast, rather than being limited to representatives from a single group or sect. Having independent members from the areas where the violations occurred would provide reassurance and build confidence among victims and their families, encouraging their cooperation with the committee.

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<sup>32</sup> "[Syria: Coastal massacres of Alawite civilians must be investigated as war crimes](#)", Amnesty International, 3 April 2025, (last accessed: 4 April 2025).

The Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct are relevant here, as they state that “Impartiality is essential to the proper discharge of the judicial office. It applies not only to the decision itself but also to the process by which the decision is made.”

Judicial independence is essential for ensuring impartiality and justice. However, it is not sufficient for it to exist; it must also be perceived as such by the public. Therefore, impartiality should be both genuine and evident.

It is relevant to recall that the current Syrian national legal system lacks a clear and effective framework for protecting witnesses and victims, both in terms of legal texts and implementation mechanisms. Given the accusations against members of the security and military forces for committing serious violations, their ongoing presence in the field and military strength raises significant concerns about the safety of witnesses and the families of victims.

#### 4.2. Regarding the working mechanism and the principle of transparency

The presidential decree that established the commission did not clearly outline the legal basis for its operations, raising concerns about the commission’s authority to access evidence and conduct investigations independently of the Syrian transitional authorities. While the commission is tasked with “investigating violations against civilians and identifying those responsible” (Article 2) and “revealing the causes, circumstances, and conditions that led to these events” (Article 1), there is ambiguity regarding the accountability mechanisms and their presence in the Syrian context. This is particularly concerning given that there has been no announcement of plans to share evidence with relevant international bodies, such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria (COI), which play a crucial role in fostering international justice through direct cooperation with courts.

Additionally, the decision to form the committee did not include any explicit requirements for the committee to publish its report publicly (while still safeguarding the confidentiality of its sources). This lack of transparency raises concerns that its findings might be used for domestic political purposes rather than focusing on achieving justice or that the true findings could remain obscured.

The shortcomings in the committee’s composition and functioning raise several fundamental questions. For instance, should the committee collectively visit all areas where violations are likely to have occurred (crime scenes)? Alternatively, can its members be distributed across these various locations, considering their differences? Should all members hear testimonies and



directly engage with victims, or is it sufficient for just one or a few members to do so? The absence of clear answers to these questions, along with a lack of clarification regarding them, creates a significant gap in the committee's procedural framework. This gap could greatly undermine the effectiveness of the investigations that the committee is meant to conduct.

#### 4.3. Time and Effectiveness

Thorough investigations require adequate time to collect, verify, and cross-reference evidence, interview witnesses, and conduct forensic analyses. This is especially crucial in cases like the tragic events on the Syrian coast, where over 1,700 civilians were reportedly killed, according to the Civil Peace Group -Seen. The decision to form the committee stipulates that it must submit its report within just 30 days (Article 4). STJ argues that this limited timeframe will not allow for a thorough examination of serious violations, such as mass killings, crimes against humanity, and other patterns of abuse.

#### 4.4. Trials, determination of responsibility, and the principle of ensuring accountability of higher-ranking officials

International law mandates investigations to determine the legal responsibility of higher-ranking officials for violations committed by their subordinates. Since the committee was formed from the highest levels of the executive branch, STJ argues it is likely to only hold lower-ranking officials accountable. This is because it is easier to accuse them, as they are the direct perpetrators. However, this perspective fails to consider the broader context of these events, including the fact that numerous military convoys from the Syrian Ministry of Defense and the General Security Service were dispatched to areas where mass killings occurred, alongside calls for "general mobilization" and "jihad."

Furthermore, STJ believes that decades of corruption, favoritism, and the disintegration of the judiciary, coupled with the current inability of the Syrian judicial system to effectively handle war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, severely undermine its capacity to conduct fair, independent, transparent, and public trials. This remains true even if the commission summons the accused and refers them to the judiciary. (According to Article 2.4 those found to be involved in committing crimes and violations should be referred to the judiciary.)

#### 4.5. Absence of partnership and failure to prevent denial of justice

Although the decision to form the committee granted members the right and authority to "request assistance from whomever they deem appropriate to carry out its duties," STJ has not received any positive indications that the committee is willing to cooperate with Syrian,

international, or UN human rights organizations. This lack of cooperation may imply that the committee is functioning in isolation from independent oversight, which could undermine its credibility.

The presidential decree that establishes the committee fails to address the importance of involving the families of victims at every stage of the investigation. STJ asserts that this involvement is essential for achieving justice and for ensuring that the families of victims, missing persons, and other affected individuals are not marginalized.

Additionally, STJ has significant concerns that the report's findings may be incomplete or politically motivated. There is also a risk that crimes could be attributed to "unknown parties," with no legal process available for victims to appeal decisions or request the reopening of the investigation if it is deemed lacking or insufficient.

The decree fails to explicitly recommend changes to security policies or measures to prevent future massacres. This omission is at odds with the emphasis placed by international human rights organizations on the need to draw from investigations in order to revise policies and practices, thereby preventing the recurrence of violations.

## 5. Recommendations for the National Fact-Finding Committee for Investigation into Events on Syrian Coast

Despite the above observations, STJ warmly welcomes the establishment of the National Fact-Finding committee. We look forward to the results of its intended tasks, which include conducting a transparent and independent investigation to identify those responsible for the mass killings. We hope this process will help achieve justice in a public manner and ensure that such violations do not occur again in the future.

To this end, STJ believes it is crucial to adopt a robust human rights framework based on the core principles of accountability and transitional justice. In support of this mission, we present the following recommendations:

### 5.1. Ensure an independent, impartial investigation:

The success of the committee's mission requires complete disengagement from any political entities and a firm rejection of political or military pressure from government agencies or armed factions. Such measures are essential to guarantee the integrity of the investigations and the

reliability of their findings. Additionally, the committee must look beyond the official narrative and not rely solely on reports from government agencies.

#### 5.2. Utilize modern tools and technologies for documenting violations in partnership with Syrian and international civil society organizations:

In its investigations, the commission must rely on credible material evidence. This includes interviewing the families of victims, documenting their testimonies, and examining the evidence they provide to identify any systematic patterns in mass killings. Visual evidence, such as videos and photographs of the massacres, must be analyzed thoroughly using digital verification techniques to ensure data accuracy. Additionally, the commission must engage with Syrian human rights organizations and leverage the expertise of specialists in this field.

#### 5.3. Identify responsibilities without discrimination, fear, or favoritism:

The investigation should concentrate on uncovering both individual and institutional responsibilities for crimes and violations. This includes assessing the criminal accountability of everyone involved in acts such as killings, torture, summary executions, forced displacement, incitement to such crimes, or property looting, rather than restricting the scope to only the lower ranks. Additionally, the performance of security and military institutions must be examined to determine whether internal collusion contributed to the escalation of violence. The investigation should also look into the identities and roles of armed groups that participated in the conflict and targeted civilians, ensuring that no party, particularly foreign fighters, can evade accountability for violations.

#### 5.4. Ensure the safety, protection, and security of witnesses, victims, and their families:

Given the sensitive nature of this issue, appropriate measures must be implemented to guarantee their protection. These measures include establishing secure channels for testimonies, providing legal and protective support to those reporting violations to prevent retaliation, and coordinating with relevant organizations to facilitate the relocation of threatened witnesses to safe locations, if necessary.

#### 5.5. Collaborate with international bodies to ensure justice:

The commission must work closely with the COI and the IIIM. This entails sharing evidence, testimonies, and documented information to support an independent and transparent investigation. It is also essential for the commission to communicate the complete findings of

its investigation to the United Nations and international human rights organizations. Suppose missing persons are discovered or believed to be connected to the events. In that case, the commission should work in collaboration with the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP) to determine their fate and uphold their families' rights to know and seek accountability.

## 6. Recommendations for the Transitional Government and its Associated Institutions

### 6.1. Enhance transparency:

The Syrian transitional government must publicly announce the investigation's results. The committee must release a detailed report containing the gathered facts, the names of the identified individuals and officials involved, and those who instigated the events. This will enable the public to access the investigation's findings and help prevent any attempts to conceal evidence.

### 6.2. Allow the committee to cooperate with Syrian civil society organizations and international entities:

The Syrian transitional government must adopt a participatory approach that includes both Syrian and international civil society to ensure the investigation's integrity. The commission should utilize reports from human rights organizations with documented violations, engage legal experts from relevant organizations and individuals to review evidence and provide feedback on the investigation's progress, and empower civil society to support victims effectively.

### 6.3. Control the armed forces and their support groups and ensure that violations do not occur again:

The Syrian transitional government must train security personnel in human rights principles during military operations, enhance internal accountability standards, and establish mechanisms for accountability within security institutions. Additionally, all foreign elements must be expelled immediately to ensure compliance and prevent further violations.

#### 6.4. Promote accountability and prevent impunity for all involved, free from bias or favoritism:

The government must refer those found guilty of such violations to an impartial and independent judiciary (after a judicial reform process that enables the proper handling of serious human rights violations). Trials must be public and conducted by competent courts that uphold fair trial standards, particularly given that the current Syrian judiciary is entirely subordinate to the executive branch.

#### 6.5. Combat hate speech and incitement to violence:

In light of recent events on the Syrian coast, there has been a troubling rise in sectarian, regional, and political rhetoric, especially from media professionals, supporters of the transitional authorities in Damascus, mosque preachers, imams, and religious leaders. The government must criminalize the dissemination of incitement to violence and mass murder, as well as the justification of such rhetoric. It should take immediate and stringent legal action against individuals or entities that promote hate speech. Furthermore, the government should launch awareness campaigns to foster values of coexistence and work to prevent the use of inflammatory rhetoric as a tool in political conflicts.

#### 6.6. Allow the media free access to cover events while ensuring their safety during their work:

The government must permit independent media outlets and journalists, both local and international, to freely access and navigate the areas of the Syrian coast where these events occurred. It is crucial to guarantee their safety and independence as they carry out their duties.

#### 6.7. Create a safe environment for the return of displaced persons:

The Syrian government must cease all combat operations and restore security in the cities and villages along the Syrian coast in collaboration with the local community. Additionally, the government must provide sufficient guarantees and commit to their implementation, ensuring displaced persons can safely return home. This is particularly important given the ongoing risk of identity-based killings, even after the events in the Syrian coastal area have concluded.

#### 6.8. Address harm, compensate victims and those affected, and prioritize their needs:

The government must facilitate the swift delivery of relief aid to the impacted areas while initiating urgent rehabilitation and reconstruction projects in these regions, along with

compensation for victims and others affected by the violence. These actions will help restore confidence and enhance the ability of the government and local communities to collaborate, creating a cohesive security environment that can effectively confront external threats.

## 7. Appendices

Appendix (1) - Statement regarding the establishment and launch of the “Military Council for the Liberation of Syria.” [Source](#).

### بيان حول إنشاء وإنطلاق المجلس العسكري لتحرير سوريا

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يا أبناء الشعب السوري الأبي، يا جنودنا البواسل الذين كُفِّمْتُمُ الفِيط بعد أشهر من الظلم والقهر والخطف والتصفيات الجسدية وفقاً لنظرة عرقية أو عائلية دينية، وبعد أن عجز نظام الإرهاب الجهادي المتطرف الذي استولى على وطننا بمسالدة قوى خارجية والقائم حالياً بسياسة الأمر الواقع دون أن مسوغ قانوني أو دستوري وبعد عجزه بشكل كامل عن حماية الوطن والمواطنين، وتدهورت الأوضاع الأمنية والاقتصادية والإنسانية إلى مستويات غير مسبوقة بتاريخ البلاد، وبعد أن استبيحت أرضنا من قبل قوى خارجية، فإننا نحن، قادة القوات المسلحة السورية الوطنية، نعلن عن إنشاء مجلس عسكري لتحرير سوريا.

إن هذا المجلس يمثل إرادة الشعب السوري الوطني الحر، ويهدف إلى تحقيق الأهداف التالية:

- تحرير كامل التراب السوري من جميع القوى المحتلة والإرهابية.
- إسقاط النظام القائم وتفكيك أجهزته القمعية الطائفية المثبته.
- حماية أرواح وممتلكات المواطنين السوريين.
- إعادة بناء مؤسسات الدولة على أسس وطنية وديمقراطية.
- تهيلة الظروف لعودة اللاجئين والنازحين إلى ديارهم.
- إقامة دولة سورية موحدة ذات سيادة، تحترم حقوق الإنسان وتضمن العدالة والمساواة لجميع أبنائها.
- إننا نؤكد لشعبنا أننا لسنا طلاب سلطة، وأن هدفنا الوحيد هو تحرير سوريا وبناء مستقبل أفضل لأبنائها. وندعو جميع أبناء الشعب السوري، من مختلف الطوائف والمناطق والأعراق، إلى الانضمام إلى صفوفنا والوقوف معنا في هذه المرحلة التاريخية.
- كما ندعو المجتمع الدولي إلى دعم إرادة الشعب السوري في التحرر من الظلم والاستبداد المقنّع بمصطلحات فضفاضة عليه، والوقوف إلى جانبنا في تحقيق أهدافنا النبيلة.
- إننا نؤمن بأن النصر حليفنا، وأن سوريا ستعود حرة أبية، تنعم بالأمن والاستقرار والازدهار.
- حفظ الله سوريا وشعبها.

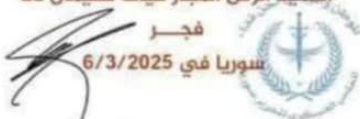
والله ولي الأمر والتوفيق وما النصر إلا من عنده

المجلس العسكري لتحرير سوريا

العميد الركن المجاز غياث سليمان دلا

فجر

سوريا في 6/3/2025



Appendix (2) - A statement issued by Sheikh Ghazal Ghazal, the head of the Supreme Alawite Islamic Council in Syria and Abroad, urging the global conscience and the international community to intervene and stop the massacres occurring against the people of the Syrian coast. [Source](#).

## بيان هام

صادر عن رئيس المجلس الإسلامي العلوي الأعلى في سوريا والمهجر

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

و صلى الله على محمد و آل بيته الطيبين الطاهرين واصحابه المنتجبين

إِنَّا لله وَإِنَّا إليه راجعون و لا حول ولا قوة إلا بالله العلي العظيم البيان الصادر عن  
رئيس المجلس الإسلامي العلوي الأعلى في سوريا والمهجر شخصياً وقد يكون  
الأخير في ظل كل هذا الإرهاب من حولنا  
تَقْضَاءُ الله وقدره نسير في هذه الحياة الدنيا مع الأبرياء و المضطهدين و  
المظلومين الذين استشهدوا في الجمهورية العربية السورية ونعود للمرة الثانية  
لنناشد الضمير العالمي و المجتمع الدولي على أن يتحرك على الفور لإيقاف هذه  
المجازر و تأمين الحماية الدولية لمن تَبَقَّى فإن المحكمة الإلهية تناشد الإنسان أن  
ينظر إلى إنسانيته لمنع كل هذه الوحشية وحماية ما بقي من هذه الطائفة من  
المظلومين العلويين لأن الأحداث التي حصلت بالتدريج بظلمهم منذ ثلاث أشهر  
إلى الآن ليسوا لأنهم فلول للنظام  
فهل الأطفال الرضع و النساء وكبار السن الغُزَل و الشيخ الجليل شعبان منصور  
حادي الثمانين عاماً من فلول النظام  
و هل هم قادرون على حمل السلاح  
لماذا ينكلون في كل قرية علوية و يقتلونهم و يهجرونهم و يحرقون بيوتهم  
ويتلذذون بالتمثيل بأجسادهم و هم أحياء فذنبهم الوحيد أنهم علويون ولا يوجد  
أي مبرر لسفك كل هذا الدم  
وفي الختام كنا ومازلنا وسنبقى دُعاة خير ومحبة وسلام نعتصم بحبل الله وننبذ  
كل أشكال العنف والتطرف والطائفية  
قال تعالى : "واجعل هذا البلد آمناً وارزق أهله من الثمرات"

والسلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته



Appendix (3) - Committee Formation Statement.



رئاسة الجمهورية العربية السورية  
Presidency of the Syrian Arab Republic

**بناءً على مقتضيات المصلحة الوطنية العليا، والتزاماً  
بتحقيق السلم الأهلي، وكشف الحقيقة، يقرر رئيس  
الجمهورية ما يلي:**

**أولاً:** تشكيل لجنة وطنية مستقلة للتحقيق وتقصي الحقائق في أحداث الساحل السوري التي وقعت بتاريخ 2025/03/6 من السادة التالية أسماؤهم:

1- القاضي جمعة الديس العنزي. 2- القاضي خالد عدوان الحلو. 3- القاضي علي النعسان.  
4- القاضي علاء الدين يوسف لطيف. 5- القاضي هنادي أبو عرب. 6- العميد عوض أحمد العلي.  
7- المحامي ياسر الفرحان.

**ثانياً:** تناط باللجنة المهام التالية:

1- الكشف عن الأسباب والظروف والملابسات التي أدت إلى وقوع تلك الأحداث.  
2- التحقيق في الانتهاكات التي تعرض لها المدنيون، وتحديد المسؤولين عنها.  
3- التحقيق في الاعتداءات على المؤسسات العامة ورجال الأمن والجيش، وتحديد المسؤولين عنها.  
4- إحالة من يثبت تورطهم بارتكاب الجرائم والانتهاكات إلى القضاء.

**ثالثاً:** يتعين على جميع الجهات الحكومية المعنية التعاون مع اللجنة بما يلزم لإنجاز مهامها.

**رابعاً:** يحق للجنة الاستعانة بمن تراه مناسباً لأداء مهامها، وترفع تقريرها إلى رئاسة الجمهورية في مدة أقصاها ثلاثون يوماً من تاريخ صدور هذا القرار.

**أحمد الشرع**  
رئيس الجمهورية العربية السورية

9 رمضان 1446 هـ - 9 آذار 2025 م

## ABOUT STJ

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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.