

## Syria: The Role of Hate Speech in the Massacres that Took Place in the Coastal Region in March 2025



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## 1. Introduction: The Violence that Swept Syria's Coastal Region in March 2025

On 6 March 2025, the first spark of what came to be known as the “Coastal Events” was ignited. Following the killing of more than fifteen security personnel in coordinated ambushes in Jableh and other coastal areas, the Syrian authorities launched a large-scale security campaign targeting what they described as “remnants of the former regime” in the governorates of Homs, Latakia, and Tartous. These rapid developments coincided with a widespread circulation of misleading and unreliable news across social media and traditional media platforms. This atmosphere led to heightened sectarian tensions, particularly in areas inhabited by members of the Sunni community, where the events were perceived as a “coup attempt” led by supporters of the ousted president Bashar al-Assad (who belongs to the Alawite sect).

Numerous cities witnessed demonstrations in support of the military campaign launched by the Syrian authorities in the coastal areas that were considered the stronghold of the Alawite community in Syria. Calls for a “general mobilization” also spread through mosque loudspeakers, while hate speech, incitement to violence, and open calls for the “extermination of Alawites” circulated widely on social media platforms.<sup>1</sup>

Amid this political and security atmosphere, the widespread dissemination of misinformation and conspiracy theories played a central role in fueling the mass and indiscriminate violence that engulfed the coastal region during March 2025. By amplifying events and presenting them through simplistic or inflammatory narratives, such information contributed to deepening sectarian divisions and stoking sentiments of hatred and revenge among various segments of the population. This coincided with a surge in hate speech on social media and from religious platforms, which served to demonize “the other” and justify acts of violence against them, ultimately worsening the situation and driving it out of control.

This report comes amid an unprecedented rise in hate speech in Syria, particularly following the wave of violence in the coastal region. It aims to analyze the role hate speech played in fueling this violence, examine the related legal and human rights context, highlight existing legal gaps, and offer practical recommendations to curb incitement and promote civil peace during the transitional period.

## 2. The Contentious Nature of Injustice in Syrian History

Since 2011, Syria has witnessed an armed conflict that frequently took on a sectarian character. The conflict was driven by a range of deeply rooted injustices and perceived wrongs, reflective of the multitude of actors involved. Notably, Sunni communities expressed a sense of marginalization that stood in contrast to the historical narratives of injustice voiced by Shi'a, Alawite, and Druze communities, alongside long-standing Kurdish claims, and tensions between rural populations and urban elites. It is important to note that most of these claims are grounded in real experiences of oppression endured by various segments of Syrian society

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<sup>1</sup> Syrians for Truth and Justice. [Syria: Serious Concerns Regarding Integrity, Independence, and Effectiveness of the Investigation Committee for Coastal Events](#). 7 April 2025





over six decades of authoritarian rule. Moreover, some of these sentiments trace back to earlier historical periods.

Thus, over the past fourteen years, Syrian society has endured a complex conflict that, at many turning points, assumed the form of a civil war. It left behind deep scars and rifts among different communities, intensified perceptions of injustice, and, in many cases, generated a sense of existential threat among most segments of society. It is well known that civil conflicts provide fertile ground for the spread of hate speech and incitement to violence based on sectarian or ethnic grounds. The situation is exacerbated when parties to the conflict deliberately exploit such speech and incorporate it into their official and media discourse, often invoking the grievances of the group they claim to represent, especially in a context marked by the widespread availability of unregulated weapons.

### 3. Hate Speech in International Covenants and Instruments

According to the [United Nations](#), hate speech is defined as any kind of communication in speech, writing, or behavior that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color, descent, gender, or other identity factors.

International law prohibits incitement to hatred, discrimination, and violence, as outlined in Article 20(2) of [the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#) and Article 4 of [the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination \(ICERD\)](#).

Given the conceptual overlap between freedom of expression and hate speech in some contexts, there is a need to draw clear boundaries between the two. While freedom of expression must be protected, it may be restricted in accordance with the permissible limitations under international human rights law. At the same time, freedom of expression cannot be used as a shield to justify speech that incites hatred or violence.

To ensure a proper balance between countering hate speech and protecting freedom of expression, “ARTICLE 19” introduced the [Camden Principles on Freedom of Expression and Equality](#) in 2009. These principles define “hatred” and “hostility” as intense and irrational emotions of opprobrium, enmity, and detestation towards a target group, “advocacy of violence” as the public promotion of such hostility, and “incitement” as statements that pose a real and imminent risk of discrimination, hostility, or violence against members of a group.

Similarly, the [Rabat Plan of Action](#) proposes [six threshold tests](#) to identify and assess incitement to hatred:

1. **Context:** The social and political environment in which the speech occurs plays a critical role in assessing whether it constitutes incitement.
2. **Speaker:** The position or status of the speaker in society increases the potential impact of the speech.
3. **Intent:** Whether the speaker intended to incite hatred or violence against a particular group must be evaluated.



4. **Content and Form:** The nature of the speech, including the tone, language, imagery, and symbolism, is crucial in determining its potential for harm.
5. **Extent of the Speech Act:** Extent includes such elements as the reach of the speech act, its public nature, its magnitude and size of its audience, affects the likelihood of harm.
6. **Likelihood, including Imminent:** The reasonable probability that the speech will succeed in inciting actual action against the target group.

As will be demonstrated in the following sections of this report, many examples of hate speech that circulated among Syrians during the coastal events meet these six criteria, leaving no ambiguity that what was disseminated constituted hate speech and incitement to violence; forms of expression that must be countered, not protected under the guise of free speech.

#### 4. Hate Speech under Syrian Law

The [Constitutional Declaration](#), issued in March 2025, constitutes the primary legal instrument in Syria following the fall of the Assad regime and up to the date of this report. In relation to the subject at hand, although the Declaration emphasizes the principles of national unity and peaceful coexistence, it lacks an explicit provision criminalizing hate speech. Article 7 of the Declaration prohibits incitement to discord, division, and sectarianism. It reads: ***“The State shall be committed to fostering coexistence and societal stability, preserving civil peace, and preventing all forms of discord, division, sectarian agitation, and incitement to violence.”*** However, this provision falls short of constituting a clear criminalization of all forms of incitement to hatred, violence, or discrimination on sectarian or ethnic grounds.

Therefore, STJ considers Article 7 of the Constitutional Declaration insufficient for addressing the problem of hate speech in Syria, for two main reasons:

First, Article 7 focuses on preventing discriminatory acts by the State and does not explicitly address hate speech originating from individuals or non-governmental entities. As such, relying solely on this provision to combat hate speech is unlikely to be effective. Non-discrimination clauses are typically intended to ensure equal treatment under the law, whereas hate speech often emanates from private actors, making Article 7 an inadequate legal remedy in such cases.

Second, although Article 7’s prohibition of incitement to violence may provide a legal basis for addressing one form of hate speech, international standards –chief among them the Rabat Plan of Action– emphasize that hate speech can cause significant harm even when it does not amount to direct incitement to violence. Therefore, relying exclusively on Article 7 would leave many harmful expressions outside the scope of legal regulation. While incitement to violence is one of the most dangerous forms of speech and should indeed be prohibited, hate speech also includes expressions that dehumanize certain groups, or reinforce discriminatory stereotypes and attitudes, even in the absence of a direct call for violence.



## 5. Examples of Hate Speech Surrounding the Coastal Events

### 5.1. Political and Religious Dimensions

As the Syrian military leadership launched a military and security campaign in the coastal region to pursue what it [referred to](#) as “remnants of Assad’s militias,” a wave of false and misleading news spread rapidly among Syrians through social media platforms. Additionally, several Arab and local media outlets contributed to framing the situation as either a “coup attempt” or, at times, a “separatist movement.”<sup>2</sup> In all cases, this portrayal mobilized a broad base of public support for the military actions in the coastal region<sup>3</sup> and encouraged calls for a forceful and uncompromising response against the so-called “rebels from the former regime and their popular base.”

During this period, hate speech against Alawites in Syria took multiple forms. Politically, the label of “remnants” was generalized to include all members of the Alawite community, who were collectively held responsible for all crimes committed by the Assad regime over the past fourteen years. Under this logic of collective guilt, “all Sunni Syrians” were viewed as victims, while “all Alawites (and other minorities)” were perceived as perpetrators, thus politically justifying the massacres committed in various towns and villages along the Syrian coast in the days that followed.<sup>4</sup>

Religiously, a fatwa by Ibn Taymiyyah declaring Alawites as infidels was widely recirculated. Across different regions of Syria, Salafists openly called from their pulpits for the killing of “these infidels.” The fallout from these events provides a textbook example of how hate speech – especially in a fragile environment marked by the widespread presence of unregulated weapons – can rapidly escalate into uncontrollable violence.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example: Al Araby TV, “[Syrian journalist Mohammad al-Faisal: What is happening in Syria is a military coup attempt backed by foreign countries, led by Iran](#),” YouTube, published on 7 March 2024. Also: Rassd Network, “[Al-Assad carries out a failed coup attempt in cooperation with a foreign state... What is happening in Syria?](#)” YouTube, published on 7 March 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, “[Amid public support of security operation in Latakia countryside | Security and military forces regain control of Jableh checkpoint](#)”. 6 March 2025.

<sup>4</sup> [‘Nabbaa’ – For Exposing Media Misinformation](#). A video posted on 12 March 2025 reads: “If you are wondering why the Syrian people hates the Nusayri sect, in this video you will see one of the many methods of killing used against Syrians, carried out in the name of Ali and al-Husayn (may God be pleased with them) and in revenge for events that took place 1400 years ago. This sect used the most atrocious and vile methods to kill us, including highly explosive rockets. Just imagine, may God protect you, the extent of their hatred toward us. This sect –if not all of it, then the vast majority– supported our killing and took part in it, whether directly or indirectly.”



Image 1. A [Facebook post](#) by sheikh Mohsen Ghosn, a Salafi who preaches in several mosques and has approximately 90,000 subscribers on his YouTube channel and around 95,000 followers on Facebook. In the post, the sheikh adopts a mobilizing and inciting stance, using emotionally charged language and militaristic rhetoric. He refers to members of the Alawite community as “a degenerate people,” claiming that victory has not yet been achieved due to their continued presence. He adds that the fighting is ongoing with high morale and calls upon the “heroes of the ummah” to continue on what he describes as the “path of purification” and to treat opponents “without mercy.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Also: [Friday sermon](#) by Sheikh Abu Omar Jabbaro on the “Nusayriyyah,” delivered on 20 March 2025.

Also: On 8 March 2025, a foreign fighter known as “[Abu Ahmad al-Jaza'iri](#)” appeared in a video in which he described the operations as a “cleansing and purification of Tartous from filth and impurity,” threatening to kill the “impure Rawafid, including Alawites and Shi'ites.

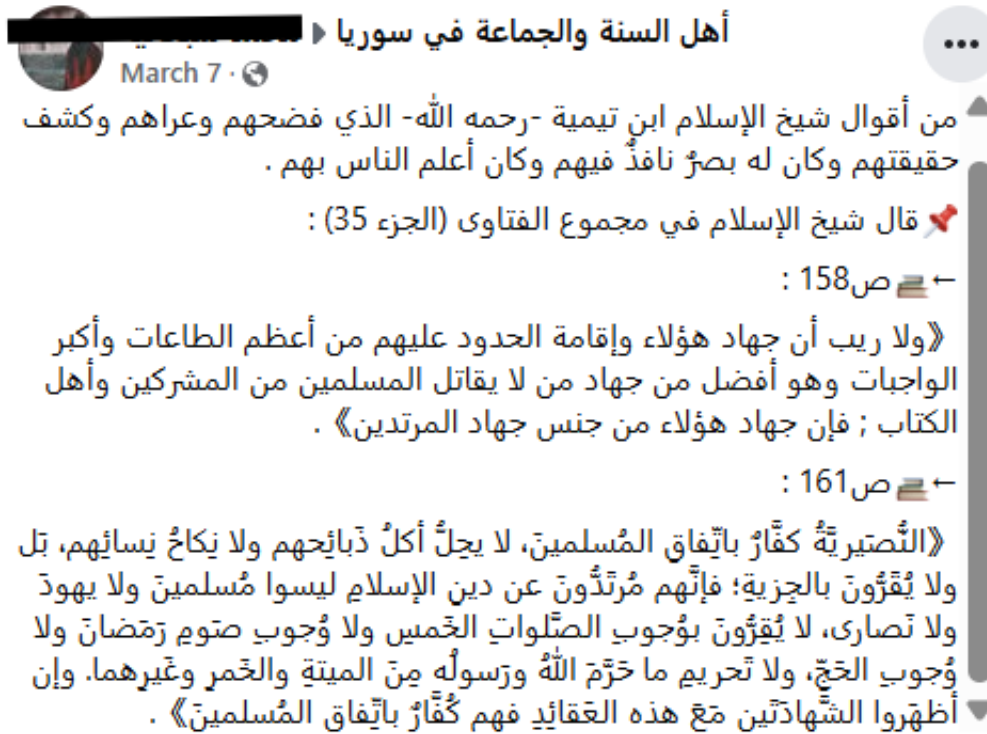


Image 2. A [post](#) circulated in Facebook groups on 7 March 2025. The post contains excerpts from fatwas by Ibn Taymiyyah concerning the Nusayriyyah, in which he declares them apostates and infidels, calling for their treatment as apostates rather than as People of the Book. He further argues that fighting them takes precedence over fighting non-Muslims.

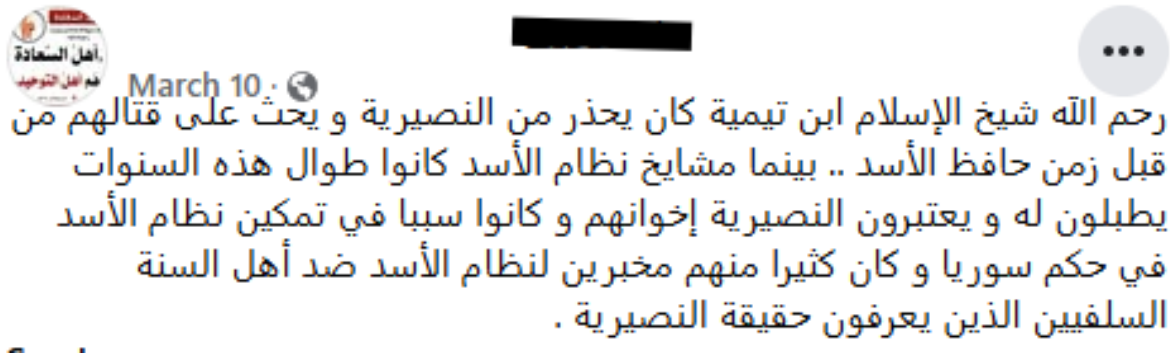


Image 3. A [post](#) dated 10 March 2025, accompanied by a video from al-Majd TV channel, published by a page that describes itself as “a da’wah page dedicated to sharing beneficial Islamic content in accordance with the Qur’an, Sunnah, and the understanding of the Salaf of the ummah.” The post glorifies Ibn Taymiyyah for his hostile stance toward the Nusayriyyah and his call to fight them. It also condemns religious figures affiliated with the Assad regime, accusing them of collusion with the Alawite community, supporting the regime, committing treason, and reporting Salafis to the authorities.





Image 4. A [post](#) dated 19 March 2025 containing religious claims that disparage the beliefs of the Alawite community “Nusayriyyah”. The post accuses the sect of following a distorted religious text attributed to al-Khusaibi, denying the pillars of Islam, and engaging in secret rituals that allegedly include prohibited acts such as alcohol consumption. It also refers to beliefs ascribed to the group. The message is framed within a context of doctrinal vilification and includes sweeping generalizations that target religious beliefs in a mocking and inciting tone.

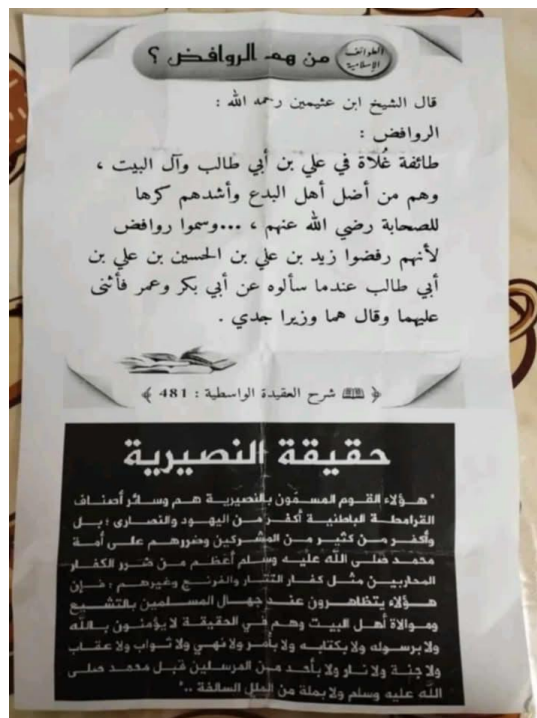
(A number of religious shrines sacred to Alawites were reportedly attacked and vandalized. The assailants subsequently shared images they claimed were sacred texts belonging to the Alawite community, which were circulated alongside false and inciting commentary against Alawites.)

## 5.2. Instrumentalization of Hate Speech to Incite and Justify Violence

The bloody events that unfolded in Syria's coastal region in March 2025 demonstrated the alarming speed at which hate speech can escalate into widespread, random, and retaliatory acts of violence. On 7 April 2025, STJ published a report titled "[Syria: Serious Concerns Regarding Integrity, Independence, and Effectiveness of the Investigation Committee for Coastal Events](#)." The report addressed the massacres committed during the events, including statistics on victims and the waves of displacement that followed.

The report also noted that hate speech targeting Syrians from the Alawite community began spreading as early as the first month following the fall of the regime, and that this discourse has since been accompanied by violations in various parts of the country. The months of December 2024, January, and February 2025 saw a notable surge in violent incidents and abuses targeting civilians from both the Alawite and Murshidiyyah communities in the governorates of Homs, Latakia, and Tartous.

Human rights reports documented several extrajudicial killings of civilians, including a mass killing that took place in the village of Fahel in rural Homs –inhabited by members of the Murshidiyyah sect– which left 15 people dead, including civilian victims, on 23 January 2025. [Three judges](#) were also killed, along with prominent [religious](#) and [social](#) figures from the Alawite community. Further reports documented grave violations, including attacks on cemeteries, targeted arrests, and [degrading treatment of detainees](#), such as being forced to [mimic the sounds of dogs](#) or to scream humiliating slogans. In the city of Jableh in rural Latakia, demonstrators chanted hostile slogans against Syrians from the Alawite community during public protests.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> Jableh, end of February 2025: [Video 1](#), [Video 2](#).

Image 5. A leaflet containing inflammatory religious rhetoric targeting the Alawite (Nusayriyyah) community and Shi'a Muslims in general, disseminated in public spaces. The leaflet draws on quotations from religious sources and is divided into two sections: The first addresses “the Rawafid”, citing a statement attributed to Sheikh Ibn Uthaymeen, in which they are described as “extreme in their veneration of Ali” and characterized as followers of heretical innovation and sin. The second discusses the “Nusayriyyah”, portraying them as “more infidels than Jews and Christians” and claiming that their harm to Muslims surpasses that of polytheists.



Image 6. A leaflet quoting Ibn Taymiyyah as stating that the “Nusayriyyah” were responsible for the suffering of Islam and its followers, and that they had spilled Muslim blood.

(STJ documented several accounts and pages that circulated these two images along with a report stating that the leaflets had been distributed in Latakia during February 2025. However, STJ was unable to independently verify this information through local sources)<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See: [Link 1](#), [Link 2](#), [Link 3](#), [Link 4](#).





Image 7. A [report](#) circulated on 7 March 2025 announced the killing of a religious figure from the Alawite community named Shaaban Mansour, along with his son and several armed individuals. The post described him as the “chief priest of the Nusayriyyah” and a “criminal,” accusing him of supporting the shelling of Sunni areas during the war. The language used to report his death was marked by incitement and gloating.

It is worth noting that this type of discourse –which serves to stigmatize the other and redefine them as an “enemy,” a “disease,” and something that must be “purged”– remains widespread, and no serious efforts have been made to counter it as of the time of writing this report. Although it saw a decline after April, it was effectively repurposed to justify the massacres that were committed to silence and suppress dissenting voices against the new government, and to target other components of Syrian society, such as the Kurds and Druze.



Image 8. A [post](#) dated 21 April 2025 (after the end of the military campaign) reports the discovery of an arms depot in rural Homs allegedly belonging to a “Nusayriyyah family”. The post claims that the weapons were intended for use against civilians and suggests that large additional stockpiles remain hidden. The language used in the post is inciting and employs sectarian generalizations.

On 9 March 2025, al-Marjeh Square in Damascus witnessed a [sit-in](#) calling for an end to the killings and massacres taking place in Syria’s coastal region. The participants held up photos of victims, including members of the public security forces killed during the events. Nevertheless, the demonstrators were attacked by a group of supporters of the new government and of the armed factions operating in the coastal region. According to eyewitness accounts, the attackers chanted [sectarian slogans](#) before launching their assault. The demonstrators attempted to defuse the situation by chanting “The Syrian people are one,” but were subsequently beaten and forced to leave the site. This incident illustrates how hate speech resurfaced to portray those expressing solidarity with the victims as “remnants” deserving of violence.

### 5.3.The Role of Influencers and Social Media Activists in Spreading Hate Speech

In a statement highlighting the role of online platforms in fueling hate speech, Anas Jerjawi, Euro-Med Monitor’s Chief Operating Officer, wrote in an [article](#) published on 12 March 2025: “The reality of the crisis is that hateful online rhetoric is often spontaneous, but the truly dangerous aspect of the situation is that several prominent Syrian bloggers and activists have justified these crimes and provided excuses for their perpetrators. In doing so, they have inadvertently encouraged ordinary people to adopt a vindictive mindset, contributing significantly to the spread and normalisation of such rhetoric.” During the documentation of the massacres committed in Syria’s coastal region in March 2025, STJ observed an unprecedented spread of hate speech against Alawites –both in religious and political forms– across the platforms of influencers and social media activists.

In early March, Mohamad Jaddou, a Syrian refugee residing in Germany, appeared in a [video](#) in which he justified the mass killing of Alawites. He cited a fatwa by Ibn Taymiyyah permitting the fighting of Alawites, Shi'ites, and Druze, claiming that such fighting was even preferable to fighting Jews. According to the Lebanese newspaper [Al-Akhbar](#), the video also reached German politician Markus Frohnmair, head of the Alternative for Germany (AFD) party, who reposted it on the platform X with the caption: "A Syrian refugee supporting Al-Qaeda and openly inciting massacres against religious minorities in Syria. There is no place in Germany for such sympathizers with terrorism." Within hours of the video's circulation, it was reported that Germany's counter-terrorism unit contacted Jaddou and informed him of the possibility of deportation to Syria, prompting him to delete the video and issue a public apology to Christians, Druze, Alawites, Shi'ites, and all religious minorities in Syria.

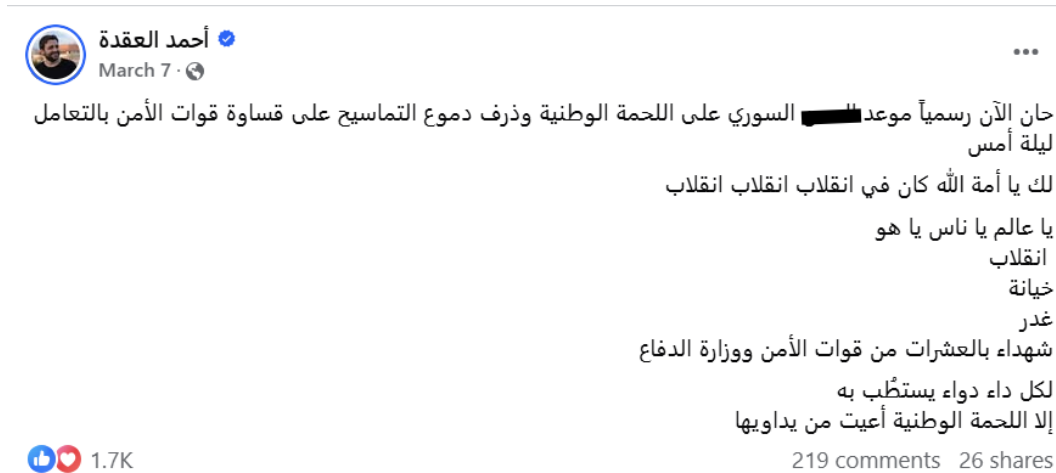


Image 9. On 7 March 2025, Syrian journalist Ahmad Al-Oqdeh –who has over 175,000 followers on Facebook– published a sarcastic and emotionally charged [post](#) in which he mocked the discourse centered on “national unity” in the wake of what he described as a coup attempt and act of betrayal that resulted in the deaths of dozens of security and Ministry of Defense personnel. Using derisive language, he argued that appeals to national unity had become futile, likening them to the shedding of “crocodile tears.” (One word in the post has been redacted in black due to its unsuitability for publication.)

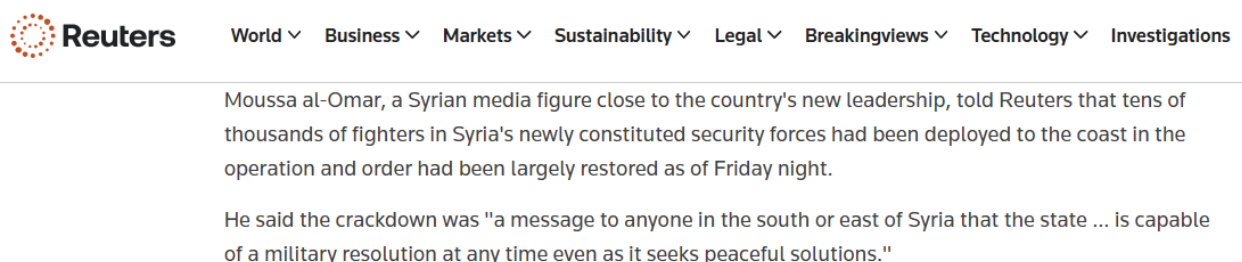


Image 10. Mousa Al-Omar, a Syrian media figure closely aligned with the country's new leadership, [told Reuters](#) on 7 March 2025 that “tens of thousands of fighters in Syria's newly constituted security forces had been deployed to the coast in the operation.” He added, in a menacing tone, that the crackdown was “a message to anyone in the south or east of Syria that the state... is capable of a military resolution at any time even as it seeks peaceful solutions.”



In mid-March, [Dutch police arrested Syrian TikToker Aseel Al-Kashef](#), a resident of the Netherlands, after a video she posted –viewed by over two million people– went viral. In the video, she incited violence by calling for the “killing of Alawites” and stated: “*Throw them into the sea, so it won't be said that fish went hungry during the Umayyad era.*”<sup>8</sup> In this context, STJ encourages Syrians residing in Europe to take an active role in monitoring and combating hate speech by understanding their legal rights, reporting incidents, cooperating with relevant organizations, and participating in awareness and advocacy efforts.

In contrast, in northwest Syria, the [Abaq Volunteer Team](#) conducted an “Iftar for fasters” campaign on 8 March 2025 (8 Ramadan 1445 AH). As part of the campaign, it distributed meals containing a printed leaflet that read: “*The Alawite has the right to rest in peace in their graves.*” Although the incident provoked widespread condemnation and outrage among many Syrians, the Syrian authorities took no action to address it. Subsequently, the Abaq Volunteer Team deleted the video and issued a public apology via its official Facebook page. Rumors then circulated alleging that the team’s director had been detained; however, team members denied these claims by posting a group photo accompanied by the caption: “*They said we were arrested,*” signed “*Abaqiyoun*” (i.e., *members of Abaq, in Arabic*). STJ later documented that the Abaq Volunteer Team’s Facebook page had been taken down.

The stark contrast between the decisive response of Dutch authorities and the passive stance of Syrian authorities in addressing blatant instances of hate speech underscores the profound legal and human rights gap that persists in Syria today. This disparity makes combating hate speech an almost impossible challenge, particularly in the continued absence of an official response and the failure to explicitly criminalize such rhetoric in the Constitutional Declaration.



<sup>8</sup> This specific phrase was widely circulated across social media accounts. See, for example, posts published on 6 March 2025: [video](#), [Mohammad Al-Salem's video](#), and a [post on the "Idlib Post" page](#).

Image 11. A photo of a Ramadan iftar meal bag distributed by the Abaq Volunteer Team, bearing the label: *"The Alawite has the right to rest in peace in their graves."*



Image 12. A group photo of the Abaq Volunteer Team posted with a sarcastic caption: *"They said we were arrested,"* signed *"Abaqiyoun"* (i.e., members of Abaq, in Arabic). The post was later deleted.

#### الثورة – لنا إسماعيل:

وسط حشد كبير من المصلين وخلال خطبة الجمعة أمس أوضح خطيب جامع أبي ذر الفغاري في جديدة عرطوز الشيخ وائل أبو مصطفى الجولاني أن سوريا الحرية والتاريخ والحضارة تتعرض اليوم لهجمة شرسة من فلول النظام المجرم، الذين غدروا بإخواننا أثناء قيامهم بواجبهم تجاه وطنهم وهم صيام، وفي حرمة هذا الشهر الفضيل.

وقال: لقد أكرمنا الله بعد سنوات عجاف بفتح مبین ضمّدتنا به الجراح، وتعالينا على عذابات الفقد والتهجير والإبادة والمجازر التي ارتكبت بحق أبنائنا من شباب وأطفال ونساء وشيوخ.

وتابع: رغم كل هذه الجراحات جاءت الأوامر من القيادة العسكرية من الرئيس أحمد الشرع، أنه من دخل بيته فهو آمن، ومن ألقى السلاح فهو آمن، والتزاماً بهدي نبينا، وبأوامر قادتنا حرصنا على تحقيق الأمن والأمان، إلا أن كلمات الأمان التي قالها النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم جعلت المشركين يدخلون في الإسلام، لكن من تلطخت أيديهم بالدماء في عهد النظام البائد رأينا منهم اليوم العجب العجائب، قابلونا بالغدر والاستتواء، ولأن ديننا دين قوة وعزة، كما هو دين رحمة، كان لابد من اتخاذ إجراءات حاسمة للردع وبسط الأمان.

وبين أنه نحن قوم أعزنا الله بالإسلام، ومحمد صلى الله عليه وسلم الذي قال في يوم: اذهبوا فأنتم الطلقاء، هو ذاته الذي قال: وإن رأيتم فلاناً وفلاناً وفلاناً متعلقين بأستار الكعبة فاقتلوهم.

وأضاف نحن باسم الشعب السوري الحر الأبي نقول لإخواننا في القيادة العسكرية والأجهزة الأمنية: اضربوا بيد من حديد على كل من تلطخت أيديهم بدماء المدنيين الأبرياء منذ اندلاع الثورة المباركة وحتى اليوم، ضعوا حداً حاسماً لكل من يغذي الطائفية التي لا وجود لها بين الشعب السوري الواحد، ويحرضون على التقسيم الذي لن يتحقق بفضل وعي ووحدة الشعب السوري وتجذر الانتماء لهذه الأرض المباركة.

Image 13. An [article](#) published in *Al-Thawra* newspaper on 8 March 2025 reports on a sermon by Sheikh Wael Abu Mustafa al-Joulani at the Abu Tharr al-Ghifari Mosque in Jdeidet Artouz. In his sermon, he called on the military leadership and security agencies to strike with an iron fist “against anyone who fuels sectarianism” and “incites division,” referring in particular to those he described as “remnants of the criminal regime.”

#### 5.4.Hate Speech and Disinformation

Reports have highlighted the pivotal role that coordinated online campaigns played in fueling hate speech and inciting violence before, during, and after the coastal events. While the actual presence of so-called “remnants of the regime” on the ground was limited, their influence in the digital space –particularly on social media platforms– was far more widespread. A report published by the Arab Fact Hub (AFH) on 21 January 2025, titled “[Pro-Iran Accounts Exploit Sectarian Divisions in Syria](#),” noted that “Since the fall of the regime on December 8, 2024 and until mid-January 2025, the Alawites have been a major topic of discussion and debate on social media. This is reflected in Meltwater statistics, which show over 217,000 posts on X containing the word ‘Alawites’ or focusing on them. These posts garnered over 115 million views, with an additional potential reach of 201 million views. Discussions about the sect also sparked more than 1.424 million interactions, including likes, reposts, replies, and quoted comments, averaging 36,000 engagements per day”.

Moreover, on 10 March 2025, AFH published a report titled “[Hashtag #Jaramana: Where Sectarian Rhetoric in Syria Began](#).” The report stated: “Before clashes erupted along the Syrian coast between security forces and remnants of the former regime, Jaramana served as a preliminary test for what was to come.” This was in reference to the events that took place in the city of Jaramana,

in Rural Damascus, on 28 February 2025; events that, as the report explains, were significantly triggered and escalated by the spread of disinformation.

On 12 March 2025, Raseef22 published an investigative report produced in collaboration with the Arab Fact Hub, titled [“The Arrest of Miqdad Fattihah... The Most Prominent Misinformation Surrounding the Syrian Coastal Events.”](#) The report explored a “wave of misinformation” that accompanied the coastal events, noting that some narratives claimed Syrian President Ahmed al-Shar’ had fled the country during the transitional period, while others alleged that the leader of the anti-government armed faction had been arrested. Widely circulated posts also alleged the involvement of foreign powers in Syria.

In mid-March 2025, Maysa Qabbani, Vice President of the Syrian-American organization “Global Justice,” published a [video](#) on social media in which she explicitly accused Syrian actor Jamal Suleiman of being involved in the establishment of the “Alawite Association of the United States” and of working to block efforts to lift sanctions on Syria. Although Suleiman firmly denied the allegations in [multiple posts](#) on his personal Facebook page, and despite widespread expressions of solidarity from Syrian intellectuals, the misinformation continued to circulate broadly across numerous accounts, unchecked and without consequence.



Image 14. A [post](#) by Jamal Suleiman dated 15 March 2025, in which he denies any affiliation with an organization representing the Alawite community in Syria, stating that he is not a member, despite a photo circulating of him from a previous meeting with some of its members prior to its establishment. Suleiman expresses his dismay at the use of his name in this context and criticizes those he describes as spreading rumors on social media. He affirms that he does not belong to any sectarian group and stands with the oppressed, regardless of their sect.



Image 15. A Facebook [post](#), on 17 March 2025, serving as an example of harsh criticism directed at Syrian actor Jamal Suleiman following the circulation of a photo showing him with members of an organization identified as the “Alawite Association of the United States”. The author of the post describes the organization as “sectarian” and “scum.” The post raises a series of questions for Suleiman, criticizing his failure to publicly disavow the organization and accusing him of merely attacking Maysa Qabbani, who brought the issue to light. The author also demands that Suleiman take a clear stance on the “remnants of Assad” in the coastal region and accuses him of remaining silent about violations associated with “his sect,” arguing that patriotism should not be selective or conditional.



Image 16. A [post](#) circulated on social media on 7 March 2025, addressed to those referred to as “brother mujahideen.” It warns of movement in “Nusayriyyah villages” in rural Hama, urges caution, and calls for the warning to be widely shared.

(The spread of hate speech, generalizations, incitement to violence, and the portrayal of “every Alawite as a potential enemy” was accompanied by the widespread circulation of false and misleading information on social media platforms.)



### 5.5. Has Hate Speech Infiltrated Official Discourse and Statements?

On the evening of 7 March 2025, President Ahmed al-Shar' delivered a [speech](#) (lasting 4 minutes and 11 seconds), in which he commented on the unfolding events. He affirmed that "there is no longer a distinction between the state and the people in today's Syria, Syria belongs to everyone, and it is everyone's responsibility to protect and support it," in a clear endorsement of the "general mobilization" called for by mosques across dozens of Syrian areas on the eve of 6 March.

In the same speech, President al-Shar' commended the army and security forces for "their commitment to protecting civilians and ensuring their safety while pursuing the remnants of the regime," while also stressing the need to avoid excesses and "overreaction". He addressed the so-called "remnants of the regime," whom he described as having "shed Syrian blood for decades," noting that the leadership had previously "prioritized a policy of amnesty" to avoid precisely the kind of scenario that ultimately unfolded, implicitly signaling that the period of amnesty had come to an end.

Although President al-Shar's speech did not contain explicit sectarian hate speech, STJ highlights that the broader context, the speaker's authority as head of state, the wide reach and influence of his message, and his implicit reference to "ending the state of amnesty", alongside his call for a "firm response" against the so-called "remnants of the regime", may have indirectly contributed to legitimizing acts of violence. Given the vague and expansive interpretation of the term "remnants of the regime" among his audience –often understood to encompass Alawites as a whole– STJ believes the speech may have played a role in encouraging some perpetrators of the mass and indiscriminate killings in Syria's coastal region to perceive their actions as a "sacred duty" rather than as crimes punishable under the law.

## 6. Recommendations

Syrians for Truth and Justice puts forward a series of targeted recommendations to the relevant stakeholders, structured across three complementary levels for addressing the proliferation of hate speech. These recommendations are grounded in international human rights standards and are tailored to reflect the sensitivities and challenges of the transitional period:

### First: At the Level of the Syrian State (Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Authorities)

- Enact clear legislation that criminalizes hate speech and sectarian or racial incitement, in line with international standards; most notably, the Rabat Plan of Action and the Camden Principles.
- Incorporate legal safeguards to prevent the misuse of such legislation to restrict legitimate freedom of expression, including through the establishment of independent oversight mechanisms.
- Develop formal mechanisms to monitor and address hate speech through legal channels, by establishing specialized units within state institutions in cooperation with civil society organizations.
- Ensure that individuals responsible for incitement and hate speech are held accountable before an independent judiciary, with full protection provided to





witnesses and victims, and with guarantees of non-discrimination in prosecution based on political affiliation or group identity.

### **Second: At the Societal Level (Media, Religious Institutions, Civil Society, and the Diaspora)**

- Local and independent media outlets must adhere to responsible and professional standards of reporting, avoiding the reproduction of inflammatory narratives or sectarian generalizations.
- Influencers and social media activists should refrain from justifying or disseminating any content that dehumanizes a particular group or incites violence against it.
- Religious leaders must actively resist the use of pulpits for incitement purposes and promote inclusive messaging that encourages coexistence and rejects hatred.
- Civil society organizations should intensify efforts to document and raise awareness of the impact of hate speech, while launching community engagement initiatives grounded in inclusive victim-centered narratives.
- Syrians in the diaspora should report hate speech in their countries of residence and contribute to shaping a civic discourse that avoids reproducing polarization and discrimination.

### **Third: At the International Level (Donors, Platforms, and International Organizations)**

- Donor entities should support initiatives aimed at countering hate speech and promoting civil peace, and condition funding on the respect for human rights in supported projects.
  - Global digital platforms must improve their tools for detecting inciteful content and collaborate with independent Syrian organizations to monitor hate speech-related violations.
  - International organizations should regularly report on incitement and hate speech in Syria and support transitional justice processes that ensure fair and non-retaliatory accountability.
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## 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.