

'You're a Druze... We Will Burn You and Your Motorcycle': Gross Violations against the Druze (April–May 2025)

الحرية



◆ Immediate And Unrestricted Access Must Be Granted To The Independent International Commission Of Inquiry On The Syrian Arab Republic (COI) And The International, Impartial And Independent Mechanism (IIIM) To All Areas Where Human Rights Violations Have Occurred, In Order To Ensure Independent, Impartial, And Unbiased Investigations

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سوريون
من أجل
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Syrians
For Truth
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1. Executive Summary

This in-depth investigation documents recurring patterns of gross human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, torture and degrading treatment, looting of property, sectarian discrimination, and hate speech, in the towns of Sahnaya, Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, and Jaramana (Rural Damascus), as well as the village of al-Sawara al-Kubra in northern al-Suwayda, during April and May 2025. These violations occurred in the context of armed clashes between local factions (Druze fighters) on one side, and Public Security forces along with their allied armed groups on the other, following the circulation of an anonymous audio recording containing insults to Islam. The recording was initially attributed to Druze Sheikh Marwan Kiwan, but it was later confirmed that he was not the source.

The investigation focuses on documenting the assaults that took place in April and May 2025, while Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) is preparing subsequent, more comprehensive reports covering developments in July and August 2025. The findings are based on 16 interviews with victims, their relatives, and eyewitnesses—some of whom were displaced out of fear of being killed or arrested—while the remaining families continue to live in a constant state of fear and insecurity.

According to witness testimonies and local sources, at least 119 people were killed,¹ with STJ able to verify the identities of 99 of them. The investigation also documented cases of enforced disappearance, the authorities' refusal to disclose the fate of detainees, sectarian humiliation practices, and the looting of private property, all amid a complete lack of accountability and equal enforcement of the rule of law.

The documented evidence reveals an environment marked by a security vacuum and a blatant lack of neutrality on the part of "state institutions," which allowed the emergence of opposing armed factions along sectarian lines, further undermining public trust in the authorities and exacerbating the fragility of the security situation. The gravity and recurrence of violations perpetrated by military entities linked to the transitional authorities in Damascus strongly suggest that they may have been committed as part of a broader policy targeting the Druze, potentially amounting to war crimes and/or crimes against humanity.

2. Methodology

Between 18 May and 30 June 2025, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) conducted extensive field and desk research, including in-depth interviews with 16 individuals—victims, their relatives, and eyewitnesses. Seven of them resided in the areas affected by the assaults during the events, while the rest had been forcibly displaced, either remaining in other parts of al-Suwayda or leaving Syria altogether (Lebanon, EU countries).

¹ According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, in a [report](#) published on 3 May 2025, the final death toll from the clashes in the three districts of Rural Damascus reached 119 people: 14 Druze men executed summarily, under unknown circumstances; 105 individuals from the Ministry of Defense and Interior forces, Druze fighters, and civilians killed during clashes and ambushes.

The interviews were conducted online through secure communication applications. After providing informed consent, all interviewees were briefed on the voluntary nature of participation and the potential uses of the information they shared, including its inclusion in this report. All requested to remain anonymous, and pseudonyms were therefore used to identify individuals whose testimonies are quoted. In addition to these testimonies, the investigation drew on open-source reports issued by human rights organizations and local, regional, and international media. Dozens of verified videos, photographs, and social media posts were also reviewed and incorporated into the findings of this report.

3. Background and Context

Tensions began on 27 April 2025, when the university dormitories in Homs witnessed an attack accompanied by sectarian chants against Druze students,^{2,3} following the circulation of an audio recording that insulted the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The recording was attributed to Sheikh Marwan Kiwan, who later denied any connection to it and described it as an attempt to incite sectarian strife.⁴ Although the Ministry of Interior of the transitional authorities issued a statement confirming the falsity of the allegations,⁵ it also “thanked citizens for their religious zeal in defending the Prophet’s honor,” which amounted to an implicit endorsement of the violent, inflammatory, and sectarian character of the popular reactions. Following this, Druze students in the university dormitories faced harassment and death threats.⁶ On 28 April, events escalated when pro-government armed groups attacked security checkpoints in Jaramana, leading to clashes in Sahnaya and Ashrafiyat Sahnaya⁷ that spread into the northern al-Suwayda countryside, resulting in dozens of deaths. These developments coincided with an Israeli threat to intervene to protect the Druze,⁸ and a statement by the Spiritual Council of the Druze Community rejecting sectarian incitement and calling for the protection of civilians.⁹

² Sectarian chants and threats by students against Druze students at the university dormitories in Homs Governorate on 27 April 2025, video circulated on social media (last accessed: 30 May 2025), <https://n9.cl/1cznig>.

³ An attack with sectarian chants at the university dormitories in Homs Governorate, where some students targeted Druze students, on 27 April 2025, al-Watan Newspaper (Syria) via social media (last accessed: 30 May 2025), <https://n9.cl/0aa0u>.

⁴ Sheikh Marwan Kiwan, in a recorded video, denying that he insulted the Prophet, on 28 April 2025, posted on social media (last accessed: 30 May 2025), <https://n9.cl/z1du6>.

⁵ Statement by the Syrian Ministry of Interior published via Facebook on 29 April 2025 (last accessed: 30 May 2025), <https://n9.cl/6n0zu>.

⁶ Video circulated on social media showing sectarian chants at the university dormitories in Homs on 27 April 2025, al-Suwayda 24 News Website (last accessed: 30 May 2025), <https://n9.cl/pnff8>.

⁷ Before 2011, Sahnaya and Ashrafiyat Sahnaya were two small subdistricts in Rural Damascus, with a majority population of Druze and Christians, alongside a limited presence of Palestinian refugees. With the outbreak of the Syrian uprising in March 2011, both areas experienced demographic shifts due to waves of displacement from places such as Darayya, Sbneeh, Yarmouk Camp in Rural Damascus, as well as Deir ez-Zor and al-Bukamal in northeastern Syria. Reports estimate that the population of Ashrafiyat Sahnaya reached around 850,000 residents.

⁸ News report by BBC Arabic, on 1 May 2025 (last accessed: 30 May 2025), <https://n9.cl/kduvf>.

⁹ Statement issued by the Spiritual Council of the Druze Muslim Community in Jaramana, published on 29 April 2025 (last accessed: 6 June 2025), <https://n9.cl/nxeunr>.

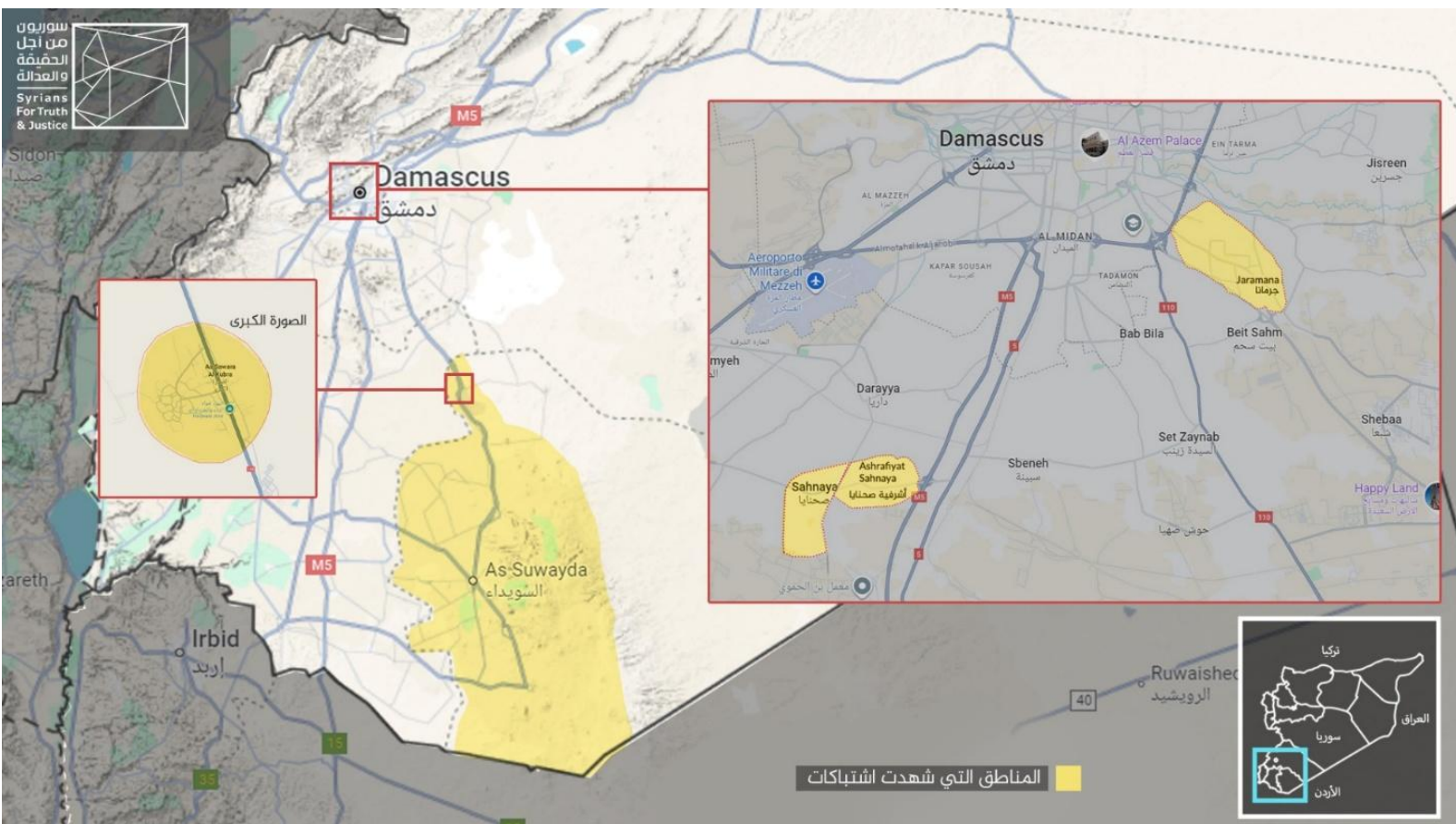


Image 1. Map of Jaramana Subdistrict in Rural Damascus Governorate, along with Sahnaya, Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, and al-Sawara al-Kubra. These are the areas that witnessed major armed clashes in late April and early May 2025.

On 30 April, Israel intervened, announcing it had targeted gunmen preparing to attack Druze residents in Sahnaya,¹⁰ while the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA)¹¹ reported the killing of a Syrian security officer in the strikes. This intervention raised fears that the clashes could be exploited to fuel wider sectarian conflict. In response, Syria's Grand Mufti, Sheikh Osama al-Rifai, issued a statement urging calm, denouncing sectarian strife, and warning against being drawn into calls for revenge.¹²

¹⁰ IDF Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir announced the army's readiness to strike targets in Rural Damascus, in a tweet by the Israeli army spokesperson, Avichay Adraee, posted on 30 April 2025 (last accessed: 30 May 2025), <https://n9.cl/9mggz>.

¹¹ Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), on 30 April 2025 (last accessed: 30 May 2025), <https://n9.cl/sed2d>.

¹² Statement by the Grand Mufti of Syria, Sheikh Osama al-Rifai, on 30 April 2025 (last accessed: 2 June 2025), <https://n9.cl/16sxl5>.

The following day, the Mayor of Sahnaya, lawyer Hussam Warour, and his son Haidar were assassinated just hours after forces from the Ministries of Defense and Interior entered the town.¹³ Although the Syrian Security Directorate announced a “broad investigation,”¹⁴ no findings had been disclosed at the time of writing this report, with the perpetrators merely described as “outlawed gangs.”

On the details and legal implications of the incident, STJ spoke with “Sarah,”¹⁵ a Druze lawyer from Sahnaya, who testified:

“After security forces entered Sahnaya, a curfew was announced, and we stayed in our homes. We then heard heavy gunfire around the town. Hours later, news spread of the assassination of Mayor Hussam Warour and his son Haidar. This incident was not isolated from the security context, as the killing occurred only hours after Public Security forces entered the town under the pretext of ‘imposing security and restoring control.’”

The lawyer added:

“From a legal perspective, any assassination of this magnitude requires a transparent criminal investigation, starting with securing the crime scene, collecting evidence, and obtaining witness statements. However, the authorities merely issued a brief statement from the Security Directorate about a ‘broad investigation,’ without providing a forensic report or any indication of progress.”

Amid worsening conditions, and as part of local efforts,¹⁶ a preliminary agreement was reached to establish a ceasefire in Jaramana and Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, with the participation of the governors of Rural Damascus, al-Suwayda, and al-Quneitra, along with several community leaders and social figures. A joint committee was also formed to work on halting the armed clashes and finding solutions that would help achieve calm and restore stability in the two areas.

4. Security Vacuum and Absence of State Neutrality

The ceasefire agreement was followed by a broad security vacuum in Sahnaya and Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, manifested in the withdrawal of state institutions, their inability to impose order or guarantee civilian protection, and the absence of any neutral security authority enjoying public trust. This vacuum created fertile ground for the rise of opposing armed factions, divided along sectarian lines, which began exercising authority parallel to or in competition with the state, relying on loyalties and affiliations rather than the rule of law. This further deepened instability

¹³ News report, Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper, on 1 May 2025 (last accessed: 2 June 2025), <https://n9.cl/t65k2m>.

¹⁴ News report, Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper, *ibid*.

¹⁵ A pseudonym was used at the source’s request during an online interview conducted by an STJ researcher on 29 June 2025.

¹⁶ A preliminary agreement was reached to establish a ceasefire in Jaramana and Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), on 30 April 2025 (last accessed: 2 June 2025), <https://n9.cl/nbepj>.

and weakened public confidence in the authorities' capacity to manage the crisis or provide protection.

According to the testimony of "Hussam,"¹⁷ a local resident and eyewitness:

"The situation gradually spiraled after the regime's direct control over Sahnaya collapsed. The area was caught in a tug-of-war between the Druze 'Men of Dignity Movement/Rejal al-Karama,' led by Sheikh Yasser Haj Ali, on one side, and armed Sunni men on the other, aligned with the 'Ansar al-Hay'a' faction. Weapons became widespread, and every family had to protect itself."

Witnesses identified Ansar al-Hay'a as a Sunni faction largely composed of fighters originally from eastern Syria and Daraa province, most of whom resided in the housing complexes of Ashrafiyat Sahnaya. The faction's declared aim was to "target members of the Druze community." This was corroborated by other sources, including a video posted on 29 April 2025 on the [Telegram channel](#) "Zino Yasser al-Mahamid," which confirmed the faction's participation in the clashes.



Image 2. Video footage shared via a Telegram channel named *Zeno Yasser Mahameed*, documenting the involvement of "Ansar al-Hay'a" in the armed clashes in Sahnaya — screenshot.

¹⁷ A pseudonym was used at the source's request during an online interview conducted by an STJ researcher on 18 May 2025.

Hussam continued:

"After the offensive audio recording spread, the atmosphere in Sahnaya exploded, and the city turned into an open battlefield between armed men from both sides. Sheikh Yasser Haj Ali tried to intervene to calm and contain the situation, but things had already spun out of control. Armed Sunni groups began capturing armed Druze men, executing them summarily, and subjecting the Druze community to public humiliation. In response, Druze snipers positioned themselves at Sahnaya's entrances to block the entry of extremist factions from outside the area. Druze men fought alongside Sheikh Yasser Haj Ali, believing he represented an official arm of the state—especially given his frequent appearances in Damascus and widely circulated photos of him with Minister of Defense Murhaf Abu Qasra. This reinforced the belief that he spoke on behalf of the state and that siding with him offered legitimate, official protection for the area. Later, however, it became clear that the reality was very different, and we had been left without any real protection."

According to another eyewitness, armed groups from the Arab "Aqeedat" tribe, residing in the nearby town of al-Barida (adjacent to Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, Rural Damascus), also took part in the 29 April 2025 clashes, alongside fighters arriving from Daraa province.



Images 3 and 4. Video footage shared via a Telegram channel named Zeno Yasser Mahameed, documenting the participation of members of the "Aqeedat" tribe in the armed clashes in Sahnaya and Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, as well as individuals from Daraa province who were killed during the confrontations — screenshot.

STJ's documentation, based on direct testimonies, shows that several factors contributed to the complexity of the situation and created a highly volatile environment in Sahnaya, Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, and Jaramana, extending into al-Suwayda province in southern Syria. Chief among these was the growing sense of resentment among many Druze Syrians due to the marginalization of certain communities in political events organized by the transitional authority, such as the "Victory Conference" and the "National Dialogue Conference" in March 2025. In some testimonies, the transitional authority was described as having a "single political color." Discontent also mounted over the dismissal of thousands of people from state institutions—including the army, security, and civilian sectors—in these areas, which was widely perceived as an undeclared exclusionary policy.

Tensions further escalated due to fears of security dominance by actors external to the local environment, particularly in light of statements conflicting with the social and cultural norms prevailing in predominantly Druze areas. The local community also voiced strong reservations over the state's demands to disarm Druze factions while Sunni and tribal factions loyal to the transitional authority remained armed.

According to the testimonies, clashes centered in several parts of Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, notably around the housing complexes, the "Arab Bank" area, and near the al-Suweid Mosque, where heavy exchanges of fire and the use of medium weapons took place.

Sources speaking to STJ stressed that the lack of neutrality by state institutions played a pivotal role in escalating tensions and violations. Security forces linked to the central authority carried out summary executions and arbitrary arrests, disproportionately targeting members of the Druze community.

This was echoed by "Salma,"¹⁸ a Druze activist who was present during the events:

"Unfortunately, the Public Security forces were not neutral in handling the events in Sahnaya and Ashrafiyat Sahnaya. They sided with the perpetrators of violations. The so-called solution came at the expense of the victims, by disarming areas that had not initiated attacks but had only defended themselves. This is a blatant example of the absence of neutrality."

These developments highlight the urgent need to reassess the role of state institutions during periods of heightened insecurity, particularly regarding the principle of institutional neutrality. The absence of such neutrality, coupled with deepening societal divisions, further eroded trust between segments of the community and the official authorities.

The following field testimonies and documentation illustrate how this charged environment and institutional bias translated into gross violations directly affecting civilians.

¹⁸ A pseudonym was used at the source's request during an online interview conducted by an STJ researcher on 20 May 2025.

5. Documented Patterns of Gross Violations

5.1. Extrajudicial Killings or Deaths Resulting from Torture

The three districts witnessed at least 119 civilian deaths at the hands of Public Security forces and participating local factions, according to witness testimonies and local sources.¹⁹ STJ was able to document 99 of these deaths.

STJ collected direct testimonies regarding the killing of civilians, including a minor, in the aftermath of armed clashes that followed the entry of Syrian Public Security forces into Sahnaya and their takeover of the area.

In one testimony, "Layla,"²⁰ a Syrian woman now residing abroad who was present at the scene during a visit to Syria and a neighbor of the victim's family, stated:

"On 30 April 2025, Aws al-Halabi, a 17-year-old Druze high school student from Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, went out searching for his two brothers after Public Security forces carried out raids and arrested civilians and members of local factions in the village. When he reached the area known as *Mawkif al-Tayyara* on a motorcycle marked with a five-pointed star [a religious Druze symbol], he was stopped by Public Security personnel and Defense Ministry-affiliated factions deployed in the neighborhood."

According to her testimony:

"Aws identified himself as an opponent and denied any link to armed groups, but one of the officers told him: 'You're a Druze, we'll burn you and your motorcycle.' He was then shot in the neck, which caused fatal bleeding and led to his death."

She continued:

"About half an hour later, his family found him dead, while Public Security personnel stood about 20 meters away from his body without making any attempt to provide medical aid or intervene. The security forces later allowed the family to retrieve the body, but only on the condition that he be buried immediately without funeral prayers or any public ceremony, which the family was forced to comply with."

¹⁹ According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, in a [report](#) published on 3 May 2025, the final death toll from the clashes in the three districts of Rural Damascus reached 119 people: 14 Druze men executed summarily, under unknown circumstances; 105 individuals from the Ministry of Defense and Interior forces, Druze fighters, and civilians killed during clashes and ambushes.

²⁰ A pseudonym was used at the source's request during an online interview conducted by an STJ researcher on 20 May 2025.

In the context of violations committed against civilians after Public Security forces took control of Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, "Hasan,"²¹ the father of another victim, testified to STJ about his son's arrest and death under torture, revealing details of what happened from the moment of his arrest until the family was informed of his death.

"On 30 April, after the announcement of a reconciliation agreement, a Public Security force raided our home. They numbered more than ten, some wearing Public Security uniforms, others with armbands inscribed with 'There is no god but Allah' in a manner resembling ISIS insignia. They took my son, saying it was a routine procedure and that he would be back within hours before nightfall. But we never heard from him again, nor were we told of his whereabouts or fate. We waited for days with no word, until on 9 May we were informed that he had been transferred to al-Muwasat Hospital in Damascus after being interrogated in a Public Security center."

When the victim's family was allowed to view the body, they clearly saw bruises and fractures across his body consistent with beatings and torture. According to Hassan:

"They didn't hand us his ID card, nor any medical report explaining the cause of death. They only told us he had died, without any explanation. They killed him, then denied it, then buried the truth with him."

In May 2025, another victim, Mahran al-Salami,²² also died under torture after being arrested in the Sahnaya area of Rural Damascus by security personnel affiliated with the Syrian transitional authority. According to local and human rights sources, he was transferred to an undisclosed detention center, where he suffered severe mistreatment and torture that led to his death, without any judicial procedures prior to detention or official notification to his family regarding his whereabouts or the reasons for his arrest.

In another testimony, "Souad,"²³ a relative of "Ghazzwan," another victim of extrajudicial killing, told STJ:

"On 30 April, after Public Security forces stormed Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, residents including women and children were ordered to assemble at the town council for Druze residents. Ghazzwan, a 41-year-old bus driver, took his wife, son, and relatives to the council, then returned toward the council roundabout."

According to Souad:

²¹ A pseudonym was used at the source's request during an online interview conducted by an STJ researcher on 21 May 2025.

²² Post on platform X, Suwayda 24, 21 May 2025,
<https://x.com/suwayda24/status/1925210948052107594>

²³ A pseudonym was used at the source's request during an online interview conducted by an STJ researcher on 22 May 2025.

"There, Public Security personnel along with extremist groups affiliated with the Ministry of Defense arrested him and took him to one of their centers in Darayya."

She continued:

"Two days later, we received information from a recently released detainee who had been with him, confirming that Ghazzwan had been killed. A leaked video showed his torture and beheading with a knife. His brother watched the video but refused to release it due to its horrific nature."

Five days later, the victim's relatives were able to mediate with the governor of al-Suwayda, enabling the family to receive his body and bury him in al-Suwayda.

It is worth noting that on 24 May 2025, residents of Ashrafiyat Sahnaya held a collective mourning ceremony for 43 people killed during the late April clashes, with broad participation.²⁴ The event included eulogies and calls for disarmament, the release of detainees, and the initiation of official investigations to achieve justice and reconciliation.

The violations described in this section constitute a breach of **Article 6 of [the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#)**, which protects the right to life and prohibits arbitrary deprivation of life, as well as **Article 3 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UDHR\)](#)**.

They further amount to a violation of **Rule 90 of [Customary International Humanitarian Law](#)**, which prohibits torture, cruel or inhuman treatment, and outrages upon personal dignity, particularly humiliating and degrading treatment.

Contractually, these practices constitute crimes under the **1984 [Convention against Torture](#)**, which imposes a clear obligation on States Parties to neither commit nor tolerate torture under any circumstances, and to adopt effective legislative, administrative, judicial, or other measures to prevent it.

At the level of national legislation, **Article 18 of [the Constitutional Declaration](#)** safeguards human dignity and bodily integrity, prohibits torture, and affirms that crimes of torture are not subject to a statute of limitations. This also contravenes **Article 12**, which stipulates that all rights and freedoms enshrined in ratified international human rights treaties form an integral part of the Constitutional Declaration, including the right to life.

Similarly, this conduct violates **Article 534 of [the Syrian Penal Code](#)**, which prescribes life imprisonment with hard labor for intentional homicide if committed for a base motive, against two or more persons, or accompanied by acts of torture or brutality against the victim—as was the case in the killings described in this report. Moreover, **Article 391** of the Penal Code

²⁴ Collective mourning ceremony for the victims of Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, Suwayda 24 News Website, published on 24 May 2025 (last accessed: 6 June 2025), <https://n9.cl/ztcix>.

criminalizes torture, and [Law No. 16 of 2022](#) increased the penalty for torture, making it punishable by death if it results in the victim's death.

These practices thus represent violations of fundamental rights and reflect the absence of constitutional and judicial safeguards in the context of internal conflict, fostering impunity and threatening legal security.

5.2.Arbitrary Arrests and Enforced Disappearances

STJ documented several cases in which Druze civilians were subjected to arbitrary arrest without legal grounds, or to enforced disappearance following their detention. In these cases, the authorities neither issued judicial warrants nor allowed relatives to learn the whereabouts or reasons for the arrests. In some instances, the existence of the detainees was outright denied, only for it to later emerge that some had died under torture, as confirmed in the testimonies of "Hasan" and the relative of "Ghazzwan" (both mentioned above), who were killed following their detention.

"Salma,"²⁵ a Druze activist present in the area during the clashes, told STJ:

"I have a friend in Sahnaya who was arrested two days ago by Public Security at a checkpoint. This was after the security tensions had already subsided. They told him: 'It's clear from your mustache that you're a Druze,' before another added: 'And you smell of alcohol too.' They used that as an excuse to insult him physically and verbally, beating him, even though he is Sunni, unarmed, and showed no hostile behavior."

Salma added:

"The officers demanded that he unlock his phone. When he refused, they beat him with an electric baton and then forced his finger onto the scanner to open it against his will. They searched the entire contents of his phone and discovered he was part of political and civic groups on social media, with posts and opinions critical of the government. He was detained without a warrant and held overnight. The next day, his mother came to the checkpoint. She was veiled, and they seemed visibly moved by her presence and emotional plea, which pushed them to release him without filing any formal charges."

²⁵ A pseudonym was used at the source's request during an online interview conducted by an STJ researcher on 20 May 2025.

These practices constitute clear examples of **enforced disappearance**, as defined by [the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance](#), which criminalizes detention by state agents or persons acting with the authorization, support, or acquiescence of the state, accompanied by denial of the detention or concealment of the detainee's fate or whereabouts.

They also amount to violations of **Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)**, which protects against arbitrary arrest, requires that detainees be informed of the reasons for their detention and their whereabouts, and guarantees the right to challenge the detention before an independent judicial authority. Likewise, they contravene the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)**, particularly **Article 9**, which states that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile.

Under Syrian legislation, **Article 18 of the Constitutional Declaration** prohibits enforced disappearance and stipulates that —except in cases of flagrante delicto— no person may be arrested, detained, or deprived of liberty except by judicial order. While Syrian law does not explicitly define enforced disappearance or arbitrary detention, it criminalizes unlawful deprivation of liberty, with penalties increased to temporary hard labor if the victim is subjected to physical or psychological torture (**Article 556 of the Syrian Penal Code**).

5.3.Looting, Vandalism, and Property Seizures

Testimonies gathered by STJ and verified open-source information revealed multiple cases of looting of private property after home raids or during forced displacement. For example, STJ interviewed “Khaled,”²⁶ both a witness and victim, who recounted:

“When gunfire intensified in the streets of Jaramana, I felt it was no longer safe. My family and I decided to take only essential belongings and leave immediately for al-Suwayda, where my relatives live. I locked the door and left on 30 April.”

About a week later, Khaled returned to check on his home:

“I found the lock broken, and everything stolen; the furniture, appliances, and personal belongings. After asking around, I learned the looting was carried out by a man named Abu Sultan and a group linked to the transitional authorities in Damascus.”

Khaled explained:

²⁶ A pseudonym was used at the source's request during an online interview conducted by an STJ researcher on 30 May 2025.

"I went to the police station and filed a complaint. At first, they seemed to take it seriously, and indeed, two days later the perpetrators were arrested. But despite that, none of my stolen property was returned."

When he followed up with the police, they told him:

"The case is now in the hands of the military authorities; civilian police no longer have jurisdiction."

A few days later, Khaled saw the same men who had looted his house riding motorcycles in the neighborhood. He described this as a direct and intentional threat:

"It was like a message: if you don't keep quiet, we know how to silence you."

He concluded:

"The case turned from simple theft into a real threat to my life. Since then, I left Jaramana for al-Suwayda and have not returned."

In a similar context, local media and social media users reported that a citizen [recognized](#) his stolen car within a security convoy that took part in raids following the bombing of Mar Elias Church in the Dweilaa neighborhood of Damascus. Later, a [security official](#) in Darayya named Abdulrahman Tabanja appeared in front of an internal security branch in Rural Damascus, with the disputed car behind him, claiming that it had been "impounded" due to the owner's alleged involvement in "security incidents" in Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, and asserting he had been aware of the impound order.

These statements were met with widespread indignation after [surveillance footage](#) surfaced showing the car being towed from in front of its owner's house the very next day after Public Security forces entered the area. This was perceived as a blatant seizure of private property without judicial authorization or transparent legal process. Although the official stated that the car could be retrieved through the relevant branch, he simultaneously leveled public accusations against the owner, citing unspecified "personal claims" without producing any supporting documentation.

As for the car's use in the security convoy, the official dismissed it as an "individual act" by one officer, claiming the latter was under disciplinary review. Despite the seriousness of the incident, no formal statement was issued by the Ministry of Interior, raising serious concerns over lack of transparency and the misuse of civilian property for security purposes without clear legal grounds.



Images 5, 6, and 7. A set of photos showing the stolen vehicle during the armed clashes in Sahnaya and Ashrafiyat Sahnaya.

Displaced residents from Jaramana and Sahnaya expressed, in their testimonies, genuine fears of deliberate sectarian targeting, as well as the psychological and social burdens of losing their homes, security, and dignity.

“Rashid,”²⁷ who spoke to STJ about surviving an attempted killing and the looting of his home in Sahnaya, recounted:

“At around 8 p.m., I was sitting on my rooftop when I saw a group of armed men, about ten in number. Among them were Bedouins. I recognized their dialect, and they even called me by name since I occasionally worked with them herding sheep. I responded from the rooftop. As soon as I did, they opened fire without warning. I ran inside as they began breaking the lock and managed to force it open shortly thereafter.”

Rashid was shot twice in the hand while fleeing, before managing to escape into a barn where he kept his sheep, and later into the fields, where he hid until the attackers withdrew the next morning.

²⁷ A pseudonym was used at the source’s request during an online interview conducted by an STJ researcher on 24 May 2025.

"When I returned, I found that they had looted my house, taking the refrigerator, washing machine, my car, and my sheep. All night, I could see them breaking into homes, firing shots, and shouting 'Allahu Akbar.'"

Armed raids and looting also extended into al-Suwayda. On 30 April 2025, heavy clashes erupted in the village of [Buraq](#), north of al-Suwayda, after an armed ambush targeted a convoy of local forces from al-Suwayda heading to Ashrafiyat Sahnaya and Jaramana in response to calls from besieged civilians amid escalating sectarian tensions. Several [media](#) and [human rights](#) sources indicated that the convoy [fell into an ambush](#) staged by Bedouin tribesmen and [transitional government forces](#), followed by a surprise assault with machine guns and mortar fire, leaving more than [30 people dead](#).

That same day, the village of [al-Sawara al-Kubra](#) (al-Sawara al-Kabira) in northern al-Suwayda came under [shelling](#) and was [stormed](#) by [armed groups](#) that [killed civilians](#), leading to mass displacement. The groups [later withdrew when Public Security forces entered the village](#) and set up a temporary checkpoint between Hazm and al-Sawara al-Kubra. At the beginning of May 2025, [Druze police units entered the village](#) after Public Security forces withdrew, under an agreement reached between the government and local Druze sheikhs to bolster security. This development prompted a [gradual return of residents](#) to inspect their homes, where [multiple media outlets](#) documented [widespread looting](#) of most houses, [sporadic arson](#) causing significant property damage, and the [burning of the shrine](#) of al-Sayyid al-Khidr.

A [report](#) by Al-Hurra TV, prepared by Hanna Houshan on 7 May 2025, documented what he described as unprecedented looting and burning of homes in the village of al-Sawara al-Kubra, rendering the town "uninhabitable for human life," according to the reporter. Notably, the General Security forces affiliated with the transitional Damascus Authorities entered the village on 1 May 2025 and were later accused of carrying out acts of arson and looting by local Druze forces and residents who entered the village on 4 May 2025.

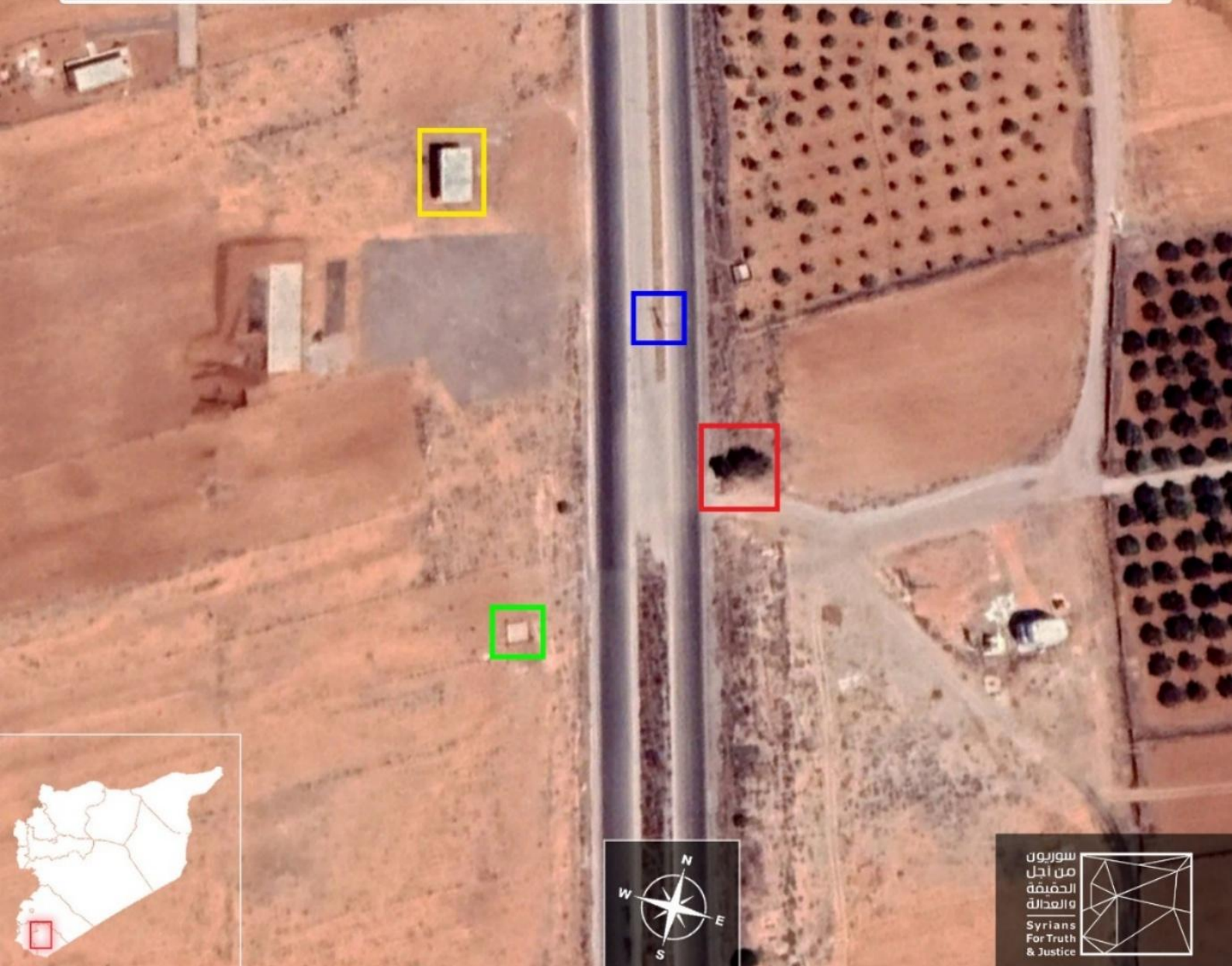


Image 8. shows the burning incidents in the village. Source: Al-Hurra TV report titled: "Eyewitness in Sweida: They Burned the Council and the Qur'an on the Shrine."



Image 9. This photo above was cross-referenced by Syrians for Truth and Justice with satellite imagery, showing General Security forces in the village of al-Sawara al-Kubra on 1 May 2025, at the following geographic location: (36.521027, 33.129674). This is the same village that witnessed the burning of the shrine of al-Sayyid al-Khidr, along with the looting, theft, and arson of civilian properties. The agency attached the photo with the following caption: "Deployment of General Security forces in the town of al-Sawara al-Kubra in rural Sweida to enhance security and stability in the area and ensure the return of residents to their homes." This provides conclusive evidence of the presence of forces affiliated with the transitional authorities in the village. Source of the photo: [Syrian Arab News Agency \(SANA\)](#).

Image 10. The following photo published on 4 May 2025 shows members of the local police (affiliated with Druze forces) and civilian actors entering the village of al-Sawara al-Kubra after the withdrawal of General Security forces affiliated with the interim authorities. (The local forces entered the village four days after the entry of General Security forces). Source: [Suwayda 24](#).





وأصبحوا صفر اليديين بعد هذه العملية



Image 11: The images above, combined with a satellite image, show the shrine of “al-Sayyid al-Khidr” after the entry of Druze forces and the withdrawal of groups affiliated with the transitional authorities in Damascus. According to local sources, the shrine was set on fire by General Security forces. Source of the first image (center and top of the photo): [Alhurra TV report](#). Source of the second image: an account named [Castello](#) on Twitter/X.).

Image 12. One of the buildings set on fire in the village of “al-Sawara al-Kubra” by General Security forces affiliated with the Syrian interim authorities, according to local sources. The following image was combined with a satellite image and geolocated at the following coordinates: 36.527372, 33.130330. Source: [Suwayda 24](#).





Image 13. An image published by [Suwayda 24](#), accompanied by the following description: "The village has been completely looted, and many of its houses were set on fire... A Suwayda 24 correspondent documents part of the damage inflicted on civilian homes in the village of al-Sawara al-Kubra, north of Suwayda governorate."



Image 14. Another image above showing a burned house in the village of al-Sawara al-Kubra, after the withdrawal of forces affiliated with the interim authorities. The image was geolocated and cross-referenced with satellite imagery by Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ). Source: [Suwayda 24](#). Geolocation: 33.127997, 36.525468.

These practices constitute clear violations of **Article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)**, which affirms the right to own property and prohibits arbitrary deprivation thereof. They also breach **Rule 52 of Customary International Humanitarian Law**, which prohibits pillage.

At the national level, **Article 16 of the Constitutional Declaration** provides that private property is protected and may not be expropriated except for public benefit and in return for fair compensation.

Furthermore, theft of household property, as described in victims' testimonies, qualifies under the Syrian Penal Code as aggravated theft, theft with use of weapons, robbery with violence, or theft committed in situations of unrest or war, depending on the circumstances, pursuant to **Article 622 and subsequent articles**.

5.4.Hate Speech and Sectarian Discrimination

Testimonies documented by STJ indicate the widespread use of explicit sectarian chants and threats, such as: ***"Hama is Sunni, we will exterminate the Druze," "cow worshippers," and "the army of Muhammad will return."*** No legal proceedings were recorded against those who promoted this discourse, and there were no security or judicial measures to curb such demonstrations or hold their organizers accountable.

For example, videos circulated by activists on social media²⁸ showed individuals wearing uniforms believed to belong to security-affiliated factions, forcing young men to shave their mustaches on camera while hurling sectarian insults. The acts were accompanied by humiliating behavior such as beatings and verbal abuse, with the process filmed and later shared on social media, apparently intended to intimidate the Druze community.

²⁸ One of these videos, published on Facebook, shows individuals in military uniforms forcibly shaving the mustaches of Druze youths while hurling abusive language at them, posted on 1 May 2025 (last accessed: 4 June 2025), <https://n9.cl/elibsz>.



Image 15. A man in military uniform, his face fully covered with a beige mask and wearing a black headband with an unclear inscription, humiliating Druze youths by forcibly shaving their mustaches on camera. Video circulated by activists on 1 May 2025 (screenshot).

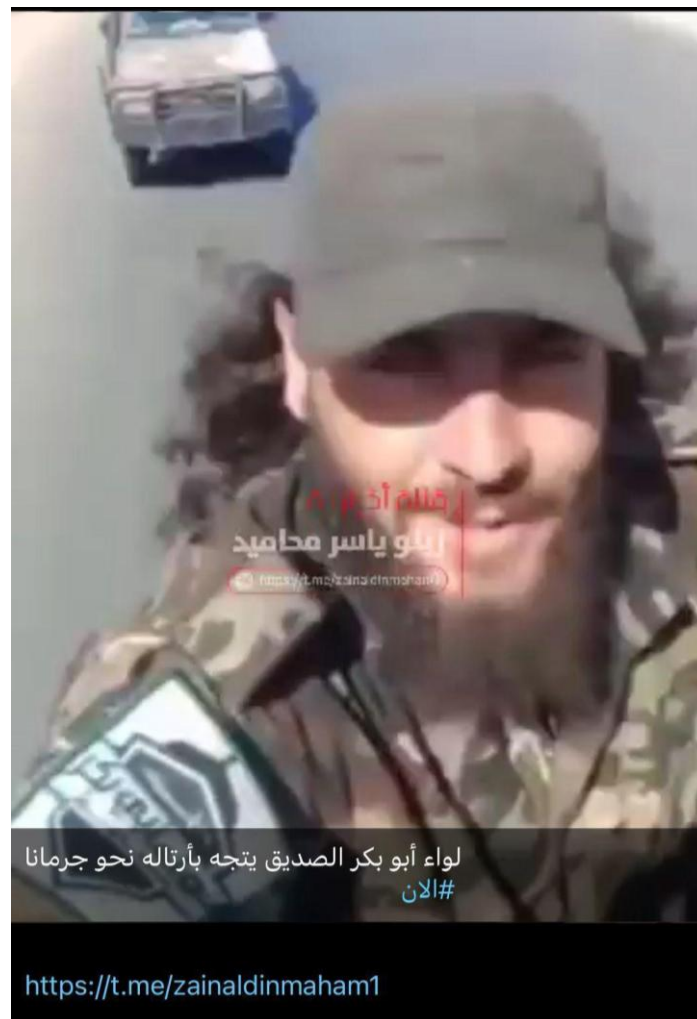


Image 16. Screenshot from a video showing an armed individual in the so-called “Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Brigade” heading toward Jaramana.

Other footage²⁹ shows armed men roaming the streets of Sahnaya after seizing control, chanting religious slogans such as “the army of Muhammad will return” and calling for “jihad” in scenes that resembled military parades or victory celebrations, while displaying hostility toward local residents.

In another video,³⁰ militants affiliated with the so-called “Thuwar al-Latamneh” appear inside a military vehicle on their way toward Jaramana, chanting openly sectarian and inflammatory slogans. One of them referred to the residents they planned to fight as “cow worshippers.”

²⁹ Armed men appear roaming the streets of Sahnaya after seizing control of the area, chanting religious slogans such as “The army of Muhammad will return,” published on 28 April 2025 (last accessed: 4 June 2025), <https://n9.cl/ygig9r>.

³⁰ In a video published on an account on X (formerly Twitter), several gunmen affiliated with the so-called “Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Brigade” appear inside a military vehicle preparing to head toward

Another recording³¹ shows a man in a Syrian Public Security uniform boasting of his participation in, or support for, violent acts against Druze civilians, using sectarian expressions such as *"Allah is for worship, Muhammad for leadership, and we for martyrdom"* and *"In God's cause we march."* This provides strong evidence of the involvement of official security personnel in spreading sectarian hate speech.

Dozens of demonstrations also broke out in different Syrian cities and regions, characterized by an overtly sectarian nature. The protests featured inflammatory slogans that openly threatened to "behead" Druze civilians, including chants such as *"Sunni Hama, we will exterminate the Druze"* and *"curse them,"*³² as documented in videos widely shared on social media. These demonstrations carried explicitly inciting content, targeting a specific religious community and collectively blaming it for political or security events, amounting to prohibited collective incitement under international human rights law.

Despite the severity of this sectarian hate speech accompanying the attacks, the Syrian transitional authorities issued no decisive official statements condemning it or calling for accountability. Instead, some official discourse appeared to align with it: the Ministry of Awqaf³³ and the Minister of Justice³⁴ both emphasized the need to criminalize attacks on religious sanctities, without mentioning accountability for perpetrators of violations or measures to curb incitement. This reflects a focus on protecting religious symbols rather than fulfilling the state's obligation to protect all citizens without discrimination.

Furthermore, no security or judicial measures were taken to halt such demonstrations or prosecute their organizers, raising concerns of official leniency, willful neglect, or even tacit complicity in allowing hate speech to spread unchecked.

The consequences of hate speech manifested not only in gross violations and direct acts of violence documented in this report, but also in discriminatory practices in basic services, most notably in medical response. For example, one witness told STJ that his brother died after bleeding for nearly three hours due to delays in ambulance arrival, which he described as a **"deliberate obstruction of emergency response."** He added that the ambulance was forced to use back roads and only reached the hospital around 4 a.m., transporting his brother from Ashrafiyat Sahnaya to al-Muwasat Hospital in Damascus, where he later died. This incident coincided with a statement from the Syrian Ministry of Health declaring that it had provided

Jaramana in Rural Damascus, posted on 30 April 2025 (last accessed: 4 June 2025), <https://n9.cl/2scvf>.

³¹ A man in Syrian Public Security uniform celebrating acts of violence against members of the Druze community during the events in Jaramana, Sahnaya, and Ashrafiyat Sahnaya in Rural Damascus, published on 30 April 2025 (last accessed: 4 June 2025), <https://n9.cl/ygig9r>.

³² A demonstration in Hama openly inciting to "behead" members of the Druze community, published on 30 April 2025 (last accessed: 4 June 2025), <https://n9.cl/s7xuej>.

³³ Post by the Syrian Ministry of Awqaf on its official Facebook page, 29 April 2025, https://www.facebook.com/awkafsyrian/posts/1105694034921914?ref=embed_post

³⁴ Anadolu Agency, ["Syrian Minister of Justice: Determined to Criminalize Attacks on Religious Sanctities,"](#) 2 May 2025.

medical treatment to the “injured from the Druze community,”³⁵ raising serious concerns about selective and politicized medical response that may have directly contributed to preventable deaths.

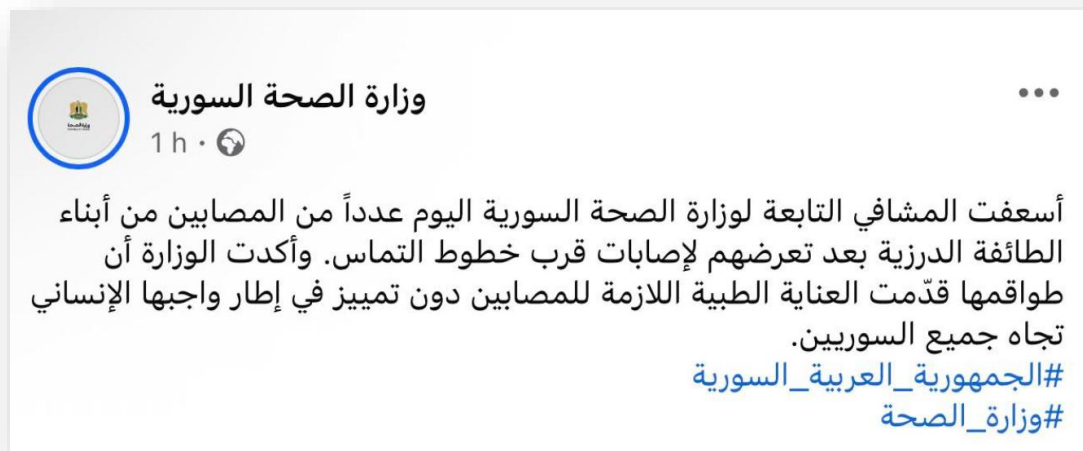


Image 17. Post from the official Facebook page of the Syrian Ministry of Health on 30 April 2025, later deleted. Activists described it as discriminatory for focusing solely on “treating injured Druze” without mentioning the victims or details of the incident, raising concerns over selective medical response and the accuracy of official information.

Allowing hate speech to spread unchecked represents a grave failure on the part of the authorities and contravenes **Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)**, which requires states to prohibit any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

The official silence of the transitional authorities also violates **Article 7 of the Constitutional Declaration**, which obligates the state to “ensure coexistence and societal stability, safeguard civil peace, and prevent sectarian strife, division, and incitement to violence.”

These practices further contravene **Article 307 of the Syrian Penal Code**, which criminalizes any act, writing, or speech intended or resulting in the stirring of sectarian or racial strife or incitement to conflict among communities.

As for discrimination in the provision of basic services such as medical care, it violates the principle of equality before the law enshrined in **Articles 2 and 26 of the ICCPR**, as well as the right to the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination, guaranteed under **Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)**. It

³⁵ “Syrian Ministry of Health Pulls Post on Treating Druze Syrians Following Criticism,” Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, published on 1 May 2025 (last accessed: 2 July 2025), <https://n9.cl/iljhzl>.

also violates **Article 10 of the Constitutional Declaration**, which affirms equality of all citizens before the law in rights and duties, without discrimination on the basis of race, religion, gender, or descent.

6. Recommendations

The facts and testimonies documented in this report reveal the commission of gross violations that go beyond isolated incidents and instead reflect a widespread environment targeting a specific population group on sectarian grounds. Extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary detention, and enforced disappearance intersected with looting, hate speech, and discrimination in basic services, all within the context of a security vacuum and the absence of state neutrality. This interconnected pattern of violations, coupled with the authorities' failure to address them, points to a structural deficiency in protection and justice systems and underscores the urgent need for comprehensive measures to end the abuses and prevent their recurrence. Accordingly, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) recommends the following:

First – To the Syrian Transitional Government:

- Uphold the principle of neutrality of state institutions, prevent the misuse of security agencies for sectarian or retaliatory purposes, and ensure they are subject to effective judicial oversight.
- Immediately release all arbitrarily detained persons, disclose the fate of the forcibly disappeared, and allow local and international human rights organizations to visit and monitor detention facilities.
- Enable the National Commission for the Missing to fully discharge its responsibilities in clarifying the fate of the missing, providing adequate material and moral reparations to victims and their families, and guaranteeing their right to justice and redress.
- Issue public directives prohibiting sectarian or religious discrimination and prosecute anyone promoting hate speech or violence, or engaging in acts of public humiliation on such grounds.
- Guarantee the protection of private property and halt the looting of civilian possessions, restoring the jurisdiction of civilian police to investigate such crimes and preventing interference by military or security bodies.
- Immediately cease all degrading practices and hold accountable all those involved, recognizing such acts as crimes against human dignity.
- Adopt a comprehensive national plan to combat torture, including mandatory training of security and military forces on international humanitarian law, human rights principles, and anti-torture safeguards.
- Ensure judicial independence and empower courts to investigate crimes committed by security forces and armed groups, free from interference by the executive or military authorities.

Second – To the International Community:

- Exert diplomatic and political pressure on the Syrian Transitional Government to honor its international human rights obligations and cease sectarian targeting of civilians.
- Press the transitional authorities to support international investigative efforts, including those of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria (COI), the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), and the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP), and to allow them to conduct independent and impartial investigations inside Syria.
- Impose targeted sanctions on individuals and entities involved in gross human rights violations, ensuring such sanctions comply with international human rights law and do not negatively affect civilians in Syria.
- Provide urgent humanitarian support to affected communities, particularly in shelter, medical services, and psychosocial assistance for victims and their families.

Third – To Syrian and International Human Rights Organizations:

- Continue systematic documentation and evidence-gathering in line with international standards, focusing on victims' testimonies and reliable sources, and ensure secure storage of such materials for future judicial processes.
 - Strengthen coordination among organizations to share information and data on violations, avoid duplication, and ensure complementarity in monitoring and documentation efforts.
 - Enhance psychosocial, legal, and social support for victims and their families, while ensuring clear pathways to justice and reparation.
 - Raise community awareness of the dangers of sectarian hate speech and incitement, and promote local reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives.
 - Train local actors on safe documentation methods and familiarize them with relevant national and international legal frameworks on gross violations.
-



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.