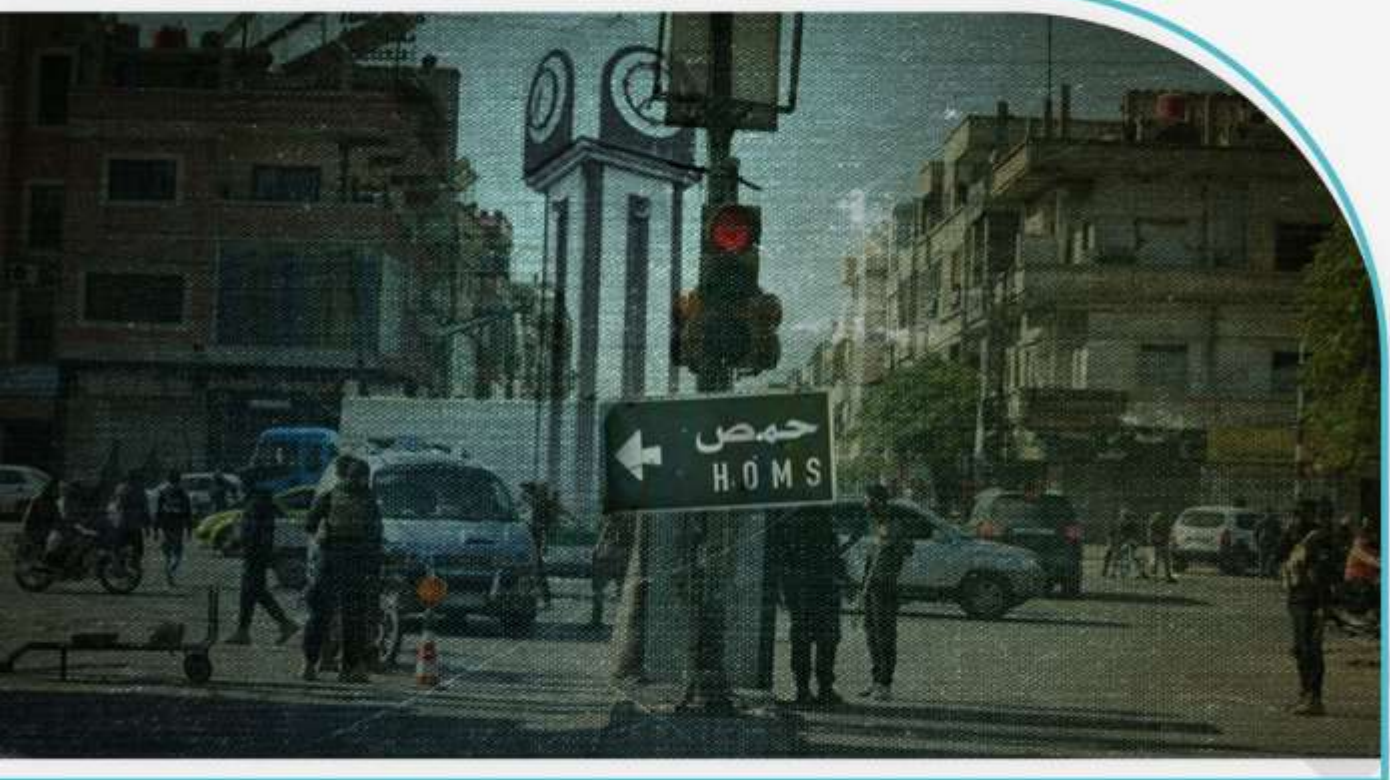


Drive-by Killings: A Recurrent Pattern of Direct Killings Using Motorcycles Against Civilians in Syria



- The Persistence Of Targeting Civilians In Alawite Areas Raises Serious Questions Regarding The Authorities' Responsibilities For Protection, Investigation, And Accountability



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1. Introduction

Over the past months, several regions in Syria have witnessed a disturbing pattern of killings executed with a similar modus operandi, characterized by the targeting of civilians from the Alawite community through direct gunfire by unidentified armed men riding motorcycles, who subsequently flee the scene within seconds. In most cases, the identities of the perpetrators remain unknown, and no results of serious investigations have been announced. According to the documentation in this report, these operations have been concentrated in Alawite-majority areas, raising increasing concerns that these incidents are evolving into a recurring pattern of violence that transcends the boundaries of isolated individual crimes.

The gravity of these events lies not only in their recurrence or similarity in method but also in their creation of a reality where daily life itself—within homes, workplaces, and during transit—becomes a potential sphere for sudden death, without warning, predictability, or prevention.

At the beginning of this year, the targeting of medical personnel in front of Al-Kindi Hospital in Homs emerged as one of the most indicative incidents demonstrating the severity of this pattern. This is significant not only due to the resulting casualties and injuries but also because it affected health sector workers in a context where they are supposed to enjoy special protection under both Syrian and international law. This incident brought back to the forefront serious fears regarding the expansion of the targeting scope to include essential civilian and service sectors, amidst a lack of effective preventive measures and serious investigations to guarantee their safety.

Conversely, it is noted in the majority of documented incidents that there is a lack of announced results from clear judicial or security investigations, identification of perpetrators, or holding those responsible for these crimes accountable. This contributes to entrenching a state of impunity and undermines the local population's confidence in the ability of the relevant authorities to enforce security and the rule of law.

The danger of this phenomenon is not limited to the number of victims or the method of execution; it extends to its profound impact on the sense of societal security and the ability of civilians to conduct their daily lives without fear of sudden targeting. This is particularly acute among members of the Alawite community, whose testimonies reflected a growing sense of being targeted based on their identity. Testimonies collected for the purpose of this report indicate that these crimes often occur in locations familiar to the victims, such as residential neighborhoods, workplaces, or public roads, and without being preceded by clashes or exceptional security circumstances, thereby reinforcing their deliberate and direct nature.

2. Methodology

In light of the foregoing, this report seeks to document and analyze this pattern of killings from a human rights perspective. It does so by corroborating direct testimonies with open-source information and assessing the facts against Syria's obligations under its Constitutional Declaration and national laws, as well as its international obligations regarding the protection of the right to life and the prevention of extrajudicial killings. Furthermore, the report aims to highlight the responsibilities of the relevant authorities to prevent these crimes, investigate them effectively, and ensure the accountability of perpetrators, thereby mitigating their recurrence and protecting civilians from further gross violations.

For the purpose of this report, STJ conducted 8 in-depth interviews with witnesses and victims' relatives, utilizing various methods, including in-person and online interviews. Informed consent was obtained from all witnesses after explaining the voluntary nature of their participation and the intended use of the information provided, including the publication of this report. 7 participants opted to remain anonymous, concealing their identities and any identifying details due to a well-founded fear of reprisals against themselves or their families. Accordingly, this report employs pseudonyms to refer to individuals whose testimonies are cited herein.

3. Case Study: Targeting of Al-Kindi Hospital Personnel in Homs

On the evening of Thursday, 8 January 2026, five personnel from Al-Kindi Hospital in Homs came under direct fire perpetrated by unidentified armed individuals riding a motorcycle as the staff were departing their workplace. According to [media sources](#) and [official statements](#), the gunmen opened fire directly and rapidly at the vehicle transporting the team, then fled the scene immediately. The attack resulted in the death of four hospital personnel and the injury of one individual, all of whom belonged to the Alawite community. The victims were: Zulfıqar Zaher (a physician), Layal Salloum (an engineer on the hospital staff), Alaa Wanous (a nurse), and Mazen Al-Asmar (the vehicle driver). Moreover, Osama Dioub (a hospital accountant) sustained injuries.

The Syrian Ministry of Health condemned the incident in an [official statement](#), expressing its grief over the killing of the health personnel and confirming that the attack targeted the workers as they were leaving the hospital. The statement noted that security authorities had initiated an investigation into the circumstances of the incident, imposed a security cordon around the site, and pledged to pursue the perpetrators and bring them to justice, while emphasizing the continuity of medical services and hospital operations. Additionally, the Homs Health Directorate issued an [official obituary](#) for the victims, a step reflecting official recognition of the incident and the status of the victims as personnel working in the health sector.

However, despite the issuance of official statements condemning the attack and confirming the opening of investigations, no clear judicial investigation results, nor information regarding the identification or arrest of the perpetrators, have been announced to date. This aligns with a broader pattern of incidents documented in this report, where cases are filed against unknown actors without the declared investigations leading to genuine accountability or sufficient transparency regarding their progress.

The Al-Kindi Hospital incident, through the nature of the victims, the modus operandi, and the location of the crime, highlights dangerous indicators of the direct targeting of civilians—including health sector workers—outside any context of hostilities or security disturbances. This raises serious questions regarding the extent of the relevant authorities' adherence to their obligations to protect the right to life and ensure the security of health personnel.

4. Victim Accounts and Documentation of Field Incidents

The direct testimonies collected for the purpose of this report, alongside information derived from open sources, corroborate the findings regarding the Al-Kindi Hospital incident. They demonstrate a recurrence of direct killings targeting civilians in areas with a majority Alawite population, executed by unidentified armed individuals in a context characterized by a lack of accountability and the absence of announced effective investigation results.

In a testimony provided by "Rama," a lawyer from the city of Homs and a member of the Alawite community, she documented the details of her sister's killing inside their family home during an attack carried out by gunmen riding a motorcycle. This incident stands as one of the clearest examples of the pattern of drive-by direct killings addressed in this report: the targeting of civilians in a location presumed to be safe, in a sudden and rapid manner, by unidentified armed men, and without any exceptional security context or armed clashes. The crime occurred inside a family home in Homs, reflecting the fragility of civilian protection and the expansion of the scope of danger to reach private spaces that are supposed to be the most secure.

Rama states in her testimony:

"On the evening of 18 August 2025, our family was hosting guests at our home to celebrate my sister's success in school. We were sitting on the first-floor balcony when we heard a motorcycle approaching rapidly. Immediately thereafter, a barrage of bullets was fired in our direction. We all threw ourselves to the ground in an attempt to survive, but my sister was struck by a bullet that pierced her chest. She lost consciousness immediately. We rushed her to the hospital, but the injury was fatal. We do not know who the shooters were, nor

did we see their faces. All we know is that they came on a motorcycle and left within seconds."

In another testimony, "Saad," a member of the Murshid community and a farmer from Suqaylabiyah in the Hama Governorate, stated that his brother was killed while grazing sheep in a direct attack carried out by gunmen on a motorcycle:

"On 7 July 2025, at approximately 4:00 PM, my brother was grazing sheep near my uncle's house when we saw a motorcycle carrying two armed men wearing camouflage military uniforms approaching him. One of them shouted at him to turn around, and within seconds, he shot him directly in the head. The other then fired randomly at his body. There had been no quarrel. After committing the crime, they left the scene. We took him to the hospital, where the doctor confirmed that death resulted from gunshot wounds."

"Yasser," a farmer from the Salhab area in Hama Governorate and a member of the Alawite community, documented the incident of the killing of his brother and his brother's wife after they went out to the orchards for work. This reality reflects the extension of the pattern of direct killings into agricultural and rural areas, targeting civilians while they engage in their daily labor under ordinary circumstances. It also demonstrates the limited initial official response in cases of disappearance, and the consequent grave risks to the right to life, particularly when urgent measures for search and protection are not taken. Yasser states:

"My brother and his wife left on the morning of 6 July 2025, to the village orchards to pick bay leaves, as they were accustomed to doing. Their return was delayed, and we were unable to contact them. I went to the General Security center and filed a report regarding their disappearance, but no actual action was taken. The next day, after a long search, we found them killed in a desolate area. The forensic doctor confirmed that my brother was hit by seven bullets in the chest, and his wife by four bullets. No possessions were stolen from them, and we have received no subsequent information regarding an investigation or accountability."

These testimonies reveal that the targeting is not based on individual behavior or a specific role of the victims; rather, it is characterized by a random nature in the selection of persons within a community inhabited by members of the Alawite sect. This reinforces a growing sentiment among members of this community that sectarian affiliation itself has become a risk factor, regardless of age, profession, or lifestyle.

In another testimony from the Salamiyah countryside, "Zeina," who works in a commercial shop in the town of Sabboura in the eastern countryside of Hama, spoke

about a random shooting incident carried out by unidentified persons on the town's market street. She stated:

"On 20 December 2025, around 9:00 AM, we heard heavy and continuous gunfire. Masked gunmen were shooting randomly in the streets. Two men were killed: Ali Ahmad Al-Mohammad (28 years old) and Tawfiq Ramadan Jafoul (70 years old). Four others were injured, including a child: Saleh Ahmad Al-Mohammad (26 years old), Taym Ayman Qabaqli (15 years old), Imad Al-Ali (65 years old), and Ibrahim Mansour (43 years old). The shooting continued for nearly an hour. We did not know who the attackers were because they were masked, and the entire village lived in a state of terror."

"Rami," a self-employed worker from the same village, confirmed the same account, adding:

"They entered on a motorcycle, masked, and opened fire on the shops and the road. They killed two men working in a vegetable shop. Security arrived after the attack ended. However, there is no protection for the village. We live without safety, especially at night."

This fear is not reflected solely on individuals but extends to impact social relations and lifestyles. Several witnesses noted a change in family behavior, a decline in daily movement, and growing isolation amidst a collective sense of an inability to protect oneself or find shelter within any public framework.

In the context of previous events indicating the temporal extension of this pattern, "Mousa," a lawyer from the city of Homs and a member of the Alawite community, provided testimony regarding the killing of one of his immediate relatives inside a commercial shop in the Al-Sabil neighborhood, in an attack executed by unidentified gunmen:

"On the afternoon of Friday, 25 April 2025, the victim was present inside his shop in the Al-Sabil neighborhood when a motorcycle carrying two people passed by. It stopped in front of the shop, and one of them fired about ten bullets in his direction. More than three of them hit the man's body in the chest, abdomen, and hand. We were unable to determine who committed this act, as the two attackers were masked, and there were no cameras in the place. The next day, a police report was filed, and the case was registered against unknown actors."

Additionally, "Hamed," from the eastern countryside of Homs and a member of the Alawite community, testified about surviving an attempted murder and sustaining a gunshot wound while working on his agricultural land. This incident demonstrates the

pattern of direct assault using firearms and the absence of any subsequent official follow-up:

"On 7 June 2025, around 1:30 PM, I was working on my land in the village of Jubb Abbas, accompanied by my brother who was working nearby. Two people approached me and asked about my work, then tried to seize my motorcycle by force. When I tried to stop them, one of them brandished a pistol and fired a shot that hit me in the stomach, causing me to fall to the ground. The assailants tried to fire other shots, but the weapon malfunctioned, so I managed to crawl and hide among the trees while they stole the motorcycle and fled. My brother heard the sound of the gunshot, ran to me, and transported me to the hospital in Homs. I received treatment, incurred high costs, and was unable to work. Despite informing the relevant authorities, no actual measures were taken, and the incident was recorded against unknown actors."

In this context, it is worth noting that the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) published a [report](#) indicating the documentation of 67 cases of liquidations and direct killings during October 2025. These were executed in various regions of Syria using similar methods, including direct gunfire, with the majority of cases registered against unknown actors and without the announcement of subsequent judicial investigation results. Among the cases documented by SOHR, which intersect with the killing pattern that is the subject of this report, are: the killing of a young man from the Alawite community hailing from the city of Qardaha due to direct gunfire targeting him inside a relative's farm (October 6); the killing of a physiotherapist from the Alawite community by direct gunfire in the Police Housing neighborhood in Homs city at the hands of unidentified gunmen riding a motorcycle and wearing General Security uniforms (October 7); the killing of a citizen from the Alawite community in the Al-Zahraa neighborhood of Homs city by bullets from unidentified persons riding a bicycle (October 11); and the killing of three people, including a man and his wife from the Alawite community, due to gunfire executed by unidentified persons riding a motorcycle in front of a shop on the Bab al-Dreib road in Homs city (October 19).

In this context, this pattern of violence cannot be separated from its effect in entrenching a feeling among members of the Alawite community that they are targeted in a manner that is unpredictable or unavoidable, which amplifies its danger compared to individual or isolated crimes of violence.

5. Characterization of the Pattern and Key Features of Killings Executed Using Motorcycles

The incidents documented in this report demonstrate the existence of a recurring pattern of killings characterized by common features regarding the method of execution, the nature of the attack, and the conduct of the perpetrators following the

commission of the crime. The use of motorcycles constitutes a pivotal element in this pattern, as it affords perpetrators rapid access to victims and facilitates an easy withdrawal from the crime scene within a brief timeframe, thereby limiting opportunities for their identification or pursuit.

In the majority of cases, the attack was executed by two armed individuals riding a single motorcycle, who proceeded to open fire directly and at close range—often aiming at the head or chest—indicating an intent to cause death. No indicators of armed clashes, resistance by the victims, or traditional criminal motives such as theft were recorded in these incidents, which reinforces the characterization of these acts as deliberate and direct killings.

Testimonies and open sources further indicate that these operations occurred in locations familiar to the victims, such as the vicinity of their homes, workplaces, or during daily transit, and at times not typically witnessing exceptional security tensions. The perpetrators were often masked, while most cases were subsequently filed against unknown persons, without the announcement of results from effective judicial investigations.

Regarding the profile of the victims, these operations affected civilians from diverse professional and social backgrounds, including health sector workers, farmers, shop owners, and drivers. Testimonies and documentation collected for the purpose of this report indicate that the majority of victims belong to the Alawite community and reside in areas that have witnessed a notable recurrence of these incidents.

Despite the absence of transparent official investigation results determining the perpetrators' motives or leading to their accountability, the accumulation of elements documented in this report limits the possibility of characterizing these events as isolated or random incidents. Instead, it compels treating them as a recurring pattern of violence possessing clear discriminatory dimensions. This pattern is facilitated by the ease of execution and the lack of accountability, leaving profound impacts on the sense of security among the civilian population—particularly in communities repeatedly affected by these attacks—which necessitates an in-depth legal analysis of the responsibilities of the relevant authorities.

In this context, the testimony of journalist Yamen Hussein further corroborates the report's findings regarding the systematic and targeted nature of the violence, providing a grounded, field-based assessment of the killings, their temporal and geographic patterns, and their profound impact on local communities. Hussein stated:

“Since the fall of the regime, the city of Homs has witnessed a wave of killings that appear, in most cases, to be systematic. These acts are carried out with retaliatory or sectarian motives, or with the aim of exerting

pressure on residents to force them to leave their homes. Such patterns have repeatedly emerged in several areas, including the Al-Naziheen neighborhood, Bayt Al-Tawil Street, and Karm Al-Louz. The vast majority of the victims are from the Alawite community, along with a proportion of members of the Murshidi community, which points to clear sectarian targeting.”

He added:

“Some cases carry an explicitly retaliatory character, while others are committed with the purpose of forcing displacement. In Karm al-Zaytoun, for example, an entire family was killed along with visitors to their home. In the Al-Naziheen neighborhood, a grenade was thrown at a house; although it did not result in fatalities, it led to the displacement of the family. A significant number of the victims are minors and young people with no connection to fighting or to the former regime. For instance, a 21-year-old young man named Yamen was found dead near the al-Khatib cemetery.”

The journalist further emphasized in his testimony that:

“To date, the authorities have not announced the identity of any perpetrator, held anyone accountable, or provided a credible explanation of the motives behind these crimes. However, when considering the ages of the victims and their geographic distribution, a clear context of targeted violence becomes evident. Moreover, the continued use of motorcycles in carrying out these killings reflects a sense of impunity, in the absence of accountability, which has contributed to a state of pervasive insecurity and a sense that such acts can be committed without fear of consequences.”

6. Legal Framework

6.1. Killing under Syrian Law and the Legal Classification of Documented Incidents

[The General Penal Code No. 148 of 1949](#) stipulates that the penalty for anyone who intentionally kills a human being without premeditation is hard labor for a term of fifteen to twenty years (Article 533). The penalty is aggravated to capital punishment [the death penalty] when the perpetrator commits the killing with premeditation and

determination—that is, after thinking and planning what they are about to do (Article 535).¹

Criminal intent (*mens rea*) in the documented facts is inferred from a set of corroborating material indicators. These begin with the prior agreement among perpetrators to plan the operation and the use of a motorcycle to facilitate execution and escape, extending to the use of a naturally lethal instrument such as a firearm, and the precise direction of strikes toward vital parts of the victim's body, such as the head and chest. The repetition of direct gunfire and the perpetrator's flight immediately upon the realization of the result, in the absence of any armed clash or danger justifying lethal force, unequivocally confirms the existence of the intent to take life. Furthermore, the execution of the attack in public places and without traditional criminal motives, such as theft or personal enmity, confirms that the act constitutes a fully comprised crime of premeditated murder according to Syrian legislation, and a flagrant violation of the right to life.

6.2. Violation of the Right to Life under International Human Rights Law

At the international level, these acts constitute an explicit violation of Article 6 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#), which enshrines the right to life and obliges States Parties to protect it. This obligation extends beyond merely refraining from arbitrary killing to include taking necessary measures to prevent the deprivation of individuals' lives by third parties.

This obligation encompasses the State's duty to prevent lethal crimes, protect individuals at risk, conduct prompt and effective investigations into every instance of killing, and ensure the accountability of those responsible. Accordingly, the persistence of direct killings against civilians in a recurring manner, absent the announcement of serious investigation results, constitutes a breach of the State's positive obligations under international law. It is noteworthy that the [Constitutional Declaration](#) affirmed that all rights and freedoms stipulated in international human rights treaties, covenants, and conventions ratified by the Syrian Arab Republic constitute an integral part of said Declaration (Article 12).

6.3. Discriminatory Dimensions and the Prohibition of Violence Based on Sectarian Affiliation

The facts documented in this report indicate that the majority of victims belong to the Alawite community, and that the killings have recurred in areas with a majority

¹ Syrians for Truth and Justice affirms its commitment to opposing the death penalty in all circumstances, in line with international human rights standards that regard it as a cruel, inhuman, and irreversible punishment. STJ further emphasizes that calling for criminal accountability does not entail advocating for the application of this penalty, but rather for the pursuit of justice and the prevention of impunity within a framework that upholds the right to life and the rule of law.

population of this community, executed in a similar manner, and absent any individual behavioral or criminal links that would explain the targeting. This element, coupled with the recurrence of the pattern and the absence of accountability, constitutes a strong indicator of the discriminatory dimensions inherent in this violence.

International Human Rights Law prohibits discrimination in all its forms, including discrimination based on religion or sectarian affiliation. Articles 2 and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) stipulate the obligation of States to guarantee rights without discrimination and to ensure equal protection of the law. Consequently, the State's failure to address a pattern of violence targeting a specific societal group, or to adopt special measures for its protection when exposure to recurring danger is established, may amount to an independent violation of the principle of non-discrimination, in addition to the violation of the right to life.

6.4. The State's Duty to Investigate Effectively and Prevent Impunity

The legal obligation of the State is not limited to refraining from unlawful killing; it extends to the duty to conduct effective investigations into every case of killing, in accordance with the standards of independence, promptness, transparency, and thoroughness, and to provide effective remedies to victims and their families. Failure to investigate, or merely filing cases against unknown actors without taking concrete steps to uncover the truth and hold perpetrators accountable, constitutes, in itself, a violation of the right to life. The facts documented in this report demonstrate a recurring absence of announced investigation results and a failure to inform the public or the victims' families of their progress. This entrenches a climate of impunity, contributes to the recurrence of these crimes, and undermines public confidence in the authorities' capacity to provide protection.

Even in cases where the identity of the perpetrators is not established, State responsibility remains engaged if it is proven that the State failed to take reasonable preventive measures or to respond effectively following the commission of the crime. This failure constitutes liability arising from omission, which is no less grave than liability arising from commission, particularly when it concerns a recurring pattern of serious violations.

7. Recommendations

7.1. To the Transitional Government

- Initiate independent and immediate criminal investigations into all direct killing incidents documented in this report. These investigations must meet the standards of independence, thoroughness, promptness, and transparency, and their findings should be made public.

- Cease the practice of merely filing cases against unknown actors and take concrete investigative steps. These should include collecting forensic evidence, analyzing crime patterns, interviewing witnesses, and utilizing available technical means to identify the perpetrators.
- Legally characterize these events as premeditated murder in accordance with the provisions of the Syrian Penal Code, and ensure the prosecution of all those involved—whether as direct perpetrators, accomplices, or instigators—in accordance with the law.
- Implement urgent preventive measures to protect civilians in areas that have witnessed a recurrence of these incidents, particularly Alawite-majority areas. This includes enhancing protection around workplaces and sensitive facilities, without discrimination.
- Establish a central investigation bureau to correlate incidents across different governorates (Homs, Hama, and the Coast) rather than treating each crime as an isolated case handled by a local police station. This is essential to investigate the links between the perpetrators and those behind them.
- Address the discriminatory dimensions of violence through public acknowledgment of the gravity of targeting a specific societal group. Adopt clear policies to prevent violence based on sectarian affiliation, in line with the principle of equality before the law, and criminalize hate speech, establishing deterrent penalties for such acts within a clear legal framework.
- Guarantee the right of victims and their families to truth and remedy. This includes keeping them informed of the progress of investigations, enabling their access to justice, and securing appropriate means of redress and compensation.

7.2. To the International Community and United Nations Bodies

- Urge the Syrian authorities to fulfill their obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), particularly regarding the protection of the right to life, the prohibition of discrimination, and the duty of effective investigation.
- Call upon relevant United Nations mechanisms, including the Special Rapporteurs on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and on discrimination, to monitor these incidents and request official clarifications regarding them.
- Support independent documentation efforts undertaken by Syrian human rights organizations and ensure their protection from any harassment or restrictions, recognizing this as a fundamental element in the fight against impunity.

7.3. To Syrian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

- Continue to systematically document these crimes, focusing on the analysis of temporal and geographical patterns, collecting testimonies from victims and



their relatives in a safe manner, and monitoring the extent to which relevant authorities conduct serious and impartial investigations into these crimes.

- Provide legal and psychosocial support to victims' relatives and survivors, particularly in affected areas, and work to dismantle the climate of fear and silence.
 - Advocate for the right to life and security for all Syrians without discrimination, and counter hate speech, incitement, justification, or denial, regardless of the source.
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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 unflinching 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.