

Forced Evictions in the al-Sumaria Neighborhood of Damascus: Disregard for Property Deeds and Violations Against Alawite Families



This Report Documents The Events In Al-Sumaria Involving Arbitrary Evictions Of A Discriminatory Nature, Accompanied By Intimidation, Violence, Arrest, And Ill-Treatment, Constituting Violations Of The Rights To Adequate Housing, Property, And Personal Liberty

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This publication was funded by the European Union, and in partnership with the Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Syrians for Truth and Justice – STJ/ the publisher and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union or the Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights.



1. Introduction

In August 2025, the [al-Sumaria](#) neighborhood on the outskirts of the Syrian capital, Damascus, witnessed a series of coercive measures that resulted in the large-scale displacement of Alawite families residing in the area. These measures were accompanied by restrictions on movement, discriminatory rhetoric, and raids involving inspections and identification of property, as well as the forcible removal of residents from their homes. This account is based on testimonies provided by residents of the neighborhood interviewed by Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), corroborated by information published in verified open sources.

According to these testimonies, the measures were carried out under the supervision of, or directly implemented by, armed groups affiliated with the General Security. They included the sealing off of the neighborhood, prohibitions on entry and exit, eviction demands issued even to individuals holding property deeds, the marking of homes, the confiscation of devices and personal belongings during raids, and the arrest of civilians among the residents. These actions reportedly led to the displacement of approximately 80% of the neighborhood's population within a short period. [Reuters](#) reported an even higher figure, estimating displacement at 85%, noting a decline in the neighborhood's population from 22,000 to 3,000.

STJ further notes that the historical legal status of the land on which the neighborhood was established is itself complex. According to property records, the land –registered as plot No. 3603– is recorded in the names of residents of Muadamiyat al-Sham, a predominantly Sunni area. Over previous decades, the property was subject to successive expropriation notations by various government entities, without the full implementation of compensation or the conduct of independent judicial proceedings to address the rights of the original owners.

The documented information indicates that the events in al-Sumaria cannot be reduced to an ordinary civil or real estate dispute. Rather, they involved coercive measures carried out in the absence of clear legal safeguards, necessitating a careful human rights-based assessment of the evictions and the accompanying practices. The significance of this report is further underscored by the risk that similar patterns may recur in other areas, rendering the analysis of this case a useful entry point for proposing more sustainable legal approaches to addressing housing and property disputes through lawful means and without recourse to violence.

For the purposes of this report, STJ conducted five in-depth interviews with witnesses from the al-Sumaria neighborhood. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after clarifying the voluntary nature of their participation and the manner in which the information they provided would be used, including the inclusion of excerpts from their testimonies in this report. Witnesses expressed a clear preference for the concealment of their identities and any details that might lead to their identification, due to fears of reprisals against themselves or their families. Accordingly, pseudonyms are used throughout this legal paper when referring to individuals whose testimonies are cited.

2. Raids and Identity-Based Screening

Corroborated testimonies documented by STJ indicate that raids in the al-Sumaria neighborhood were not carried out as routine administrative measures. Rather, they bore a coercive and selective character with an identity-based dimension, accompanied by restrictions on movement and practices resembling the de facto screening of residents. From the outset, these operations were marked by violence aimed at instilling fear and coercion within the neighborhood. “Samer” (an Alawite witness who is currently displaced from al-Sumaria to another area in Muadamiyat al-Sham as a result of his family’s forced displacement) stated:

“They entered the neighborhood firing shots and playing chants with a jihadist tone to terrorize people. Any house found empty would have its door broken down. About ten individuals would raid each house. When some women refused to open their doors out of fear, they forced them open, although only a very small number behaved in a non-violent manner.”

“Lynn” (an Alawite university student who continues to reside in al-Sumaria) further underscored the discriminatory dimension accompanying the raids, the closure of the neighborhood, and restrictions on movement, stating:

“They would enter people’s homes... and repeat sectarian insults such as ‘Go to the camps, Alawite pigs,’ and they sealed off al-Sumaria and did not allow anyone to move.”

The same witness also reported that some houses were visually marked with symbols placed on façades:

“They marked the houses with signs like O or X... and when they reached our house, they put an X on it, without us understanding what that meant.”

Testimonies further indicate that certain raid and eviction measures were initially presented to residents as an inspection carried out by a “committee” purportedly coming to review property ownership contracts. The situation, however, escalated into raids and selective practices, including the targeting of young men for arrest and the forcing of families to leave, without any written decision being issued or any official identification of the body involved or its legal authority.

This account is reinforced by “Samer,” who stated that raids were conducted **“selectively... and if there were more than two men in the house, they would take them for arrest,”** reflecting the use of de facto screening of residents and families during the inspection process.

On 3 September 2025, the Governor of Damascus [met](#) with a group of al-Sumaria residents and affirmed that **“the State is governed by law and citizens’ rights are protected and guaranteed.”** Nevertheless, witnesses unanimously reported that subsequent developments consisted of renewed pressure and attempts at forcible removal, further indicating the absence of a clear official mechanism or a reviewable administrative process, as well as a fundamental failure to uphold transparency and procedural clarity. These elements constitute essential

requirements for the lawfulness of any housing- or property-related measure under international standards, and support a finding of compounded violations of residents' rights to equality, freedom from degrading treatment, and the right to secure housing.

3. Arbitrary Arrest, Ill-Treatment, and the Imposition of Eviction Deadlines

Testimonies indicate that arrest and ill-treatment were used as direct tools of pressure to compel residents to leave their homes within short, imposed timeframes, thereby stripping any "decision" to depart of its voluntary character and transforming it into a form of direct coercion. "Lynn" reported that some detainees were released only on the condition of immediate eviction, stating:

"They arrested many young and adult men, including our 15-years-old neighbor. They took everyone who had also completed a 'status settlement'... One of the detained young men was released completely exhausted from the beating. He said they kept assaulting them until the sheikh came and said: whoever wants to leave should be released on the condition that they vacate their home by Thursday."

This explicit linkage between personal liberty and eviction demonstrates that detention did not constitute an independent law-enforcement measure, but rather a coercive instrument aimed at forcing individuals to vacate their homes within an imposed deadline. Such practices amount to forced displacement grounded in coercion rather than voluntary choice. "Hassan" (an Alawite witness displaced from al-Sumaria to Mesyaf) corroborated this pattern by stating that residents were given no more than 24 hours to leave, despite his possession of official property ownership documents, saying:

"The aim was displacement; they gave us only twenty-four hours to leave, even though I have documents proving my ownership of the house."

The imposition of such short deadlines –when coupled with threats and ill-treatment– constitutes a key indicator of the absence of procedural safeguards and any form of judicial review. This runs contrary to international standards requiring adequate prior notice, access to effective remedies –including the ability to challenge the decision before an independent body, submit objections and legal arguments, and receive a reasoned response within an appropriate timeframe– and the obligation to refrain from any form of pressure or violence in the context of eviction proceedings.

These testimonies are consistent with information documented by verified open sources indicating that a large number of families were notified to vacate their homes within 48 hours, and that some were prevented from removing essential belongings during the process – coercive measures that reportedly accompanied the campaign during the same period, as also confirmed by testimonies documented by STJ.

Reuters [reported](#) that **“This is a notification to residents of illegal housing in al-Somaria to leave their houses in no more than 48 hours or face punishment under the law,”** as stated in notices that Reuters saw posted on dozens of homes, adding that the documents indicated they had been issued by the **“Public Housing Committee of the General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic.”**

Ultra Syria [published](#) the testimony of a woman stating that “armed men informed residents they must leave within 48 hours ‘or we will demolish the houses over your heads.’” Moreover, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights [reported](#) that “an armed faction coming from Mo’adamiyah area displaced families from Al- Sumariyah neighborhood in Rif Dimashq, after giving those remaining inside the neighborhood no more than 48 hours to leave, without allowing them to take their personal items.”

The documented testimonies also align with published reporting indicating that the operations were carried out in the presence of field commanders affiliated with local factions, including an individual reportedly known as “Abu Hudhayfah,” described as one of those responsible for deploying fighters who committed violations in the neighborhood during the campaign. In this context, Reuters [reported](#) that scores of security forces led by an interior ministry commander known as Abu Hudhayfah went door-to-door, telling families they were living on land illegally seized by the Assads and demanding proof they owned their homes, according to a dozen residents and two local leaders who all said they experienced this treatment”.

Testimonies further indicate that some residents were subjected to direct physical assault, including beatings and torture. These accounts corroborate verified open-source reporting of the use of [physical violence](#) in the context of the forced evictions in al-Sumaria, including [against women](#), reinforcing the characterization of the measures as rooted in coercion and violence rather than any lawful process.

4. Forced Eviction and the Deprivation of Owners of the Ability to Remove Their Belongings and Household Furnishings

Testimonies indicate that the eviction process was accompanied by direct restrictions on residents’ ability to use, benefit from, or remove their belongings upon departure, resulting in significant material losses. “Hassan” reported that those carrying out the operation prevented residents from taking their furniture and belongings, stating:

“When we tried to take our household belongings out, members of the faction prevented us from taking many essential items. I was forced to sell property worth one hundred million for only two and a half million, because I could not afford the cost of transporting the furniture.”

“Lynn” further noted that these restrictions were not limited to property inside homes, but were accompanied by parallel constraining measures, including the closure of shops, the cutting of water supplies, and the prevention of food items from entering the neighborhood during the campaign, stating:

“They closed all the shops, cut off the water, and prevented the entry of food supplies, and then began issuing threats... while women remained inside the homes after a large number of men had left.”

Several testimonies also indicate that a number of homes were subjected to the seizure of movable property or tampering with their contents during raids, including furniture and household appliances. This adds an additional material dimension to the forced eviction and may, under Syrian law, amount to aggravated theft where such acts occur under threat or within an armed context. These measures constitute direct material pressure on residents at the moment of eviction, deepening the impact on their livelihood security and their right to adequate housing.

5. Impact of Forced Displacement on the Most Vulnerable Groups

Forced evictions typically have a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable groups – particularly children, female-headed households, and poorer families— given their limited access to protection networks and alternative resources. This in turn generates immediate social and economic risks affecting both adults and children alike.

In this context, the testimony of “Huda” (an Alawite widow who lost her husband and two of her children during the war) illustrates the profound effects of eviction on particularly vulnerable groups, notably widows and women-led households. She explained that, due to threats, she was forced to leave her home with her two children without belongings, and was unable to secure shelter or cover even the most basic expenses, which compelled her to remain in a public park. She stated:

“They came knocking on doors, terrorized us, frightened the children, insulted us and insulted my deceased children, and told us to leave with only the clothes we were wearing, without taking any of our belongings”.

She added:

“I took my children and stepped out onto the street, and I ended up sitting in the park because I cannot afford rent. None of my relatives is able to take us in, and I do not even have the fare to reach them. I go to nearby shops to collect whatever leftover food I can find to feed my two young children... My older son is twelve years old, and he too is searching for work. What have I done wrong, simply because my husband and children were killed in the war?”

This testimony reflects that the eviction took place in a context devoid of housing alternatives or adequate social support arrangements, thereby exacerbating the livelihood insecurity of resource-poor households and exposing children to heightened risks, including child labour and school dropout.

Huda’s case does not represent the only example of the compounded impact of eviction on impoverished families and women-headed households. Other similar cases were also reported,

including one widely circulated in various media outlets showing a woman and her child forced to sleep on the street due to the absence of any alternative shelter.



Image: A woman and her child forced to spend the night on the street following eviction due to the lack of alternative shelter — Source: [Rozana](#).

6. Property Deeds and the Disregard for the Legal Status of Housing

Testimonies documented by STJ indicate that the existence of property deeds or formal housing documentation did not afford residents any legal protection. On the contrary, such documentation appears to have been entirely disregarded throughout the eviction process, in a manner suggesting that the measures were carried out outside any reviewable administrative or judicial framework. “Hassan” stated that, despite possessing documents proving his ownership of the house, he was ordered to leave within a short deadline without any consideration of his legal status, saying:

“The house belongs to me, yet the documents we had did not protect us from being expelled.”

“Lynn” further emphasized the generalized nature of this practice, noting that the treatment of residents did not distinguish between those holding legal ownership contracts and those without:

“They entered homes and treated everyone the same way, whether they had a property contract or not.”

These testimonies align with a [statement](#) issued by the Supreme Alawite Islamic Council in Syria and the Diaspora, which condemned the raids and forced removals and affirmed that the measures disregarded residents’ legal documents, while also being accompanied by physical assaults and discriminatory insults.

Similar accounts have been reflected in multiple [reports](#) and [video footage](#) circulated through verified open sources, reinforcing that the measures were not linked to any legal review of housing rights nor to an official procedure for dispossession. Rather, they constituted a wholesale exclusion of fundamental procedural safeguards, which are indispensable conditions for the lawfulness of any measure affecting housing and property. This represents a direct breach of international standards requiring adequate prior notice, access to appeal and review mechanisms, and individualized consideration of legal status prior to any decision affecting housing and property, placing the incident squarely within the scope of forced evictions lacking procedural legitimacy.

7. Historical Ownership Context and the Dual Categories of Victims in the Housing Dispute

Property records and [open sources](#) indicate that al-Sumaria is built on a land plot (No. 3603) that, over successive decades, was subjected to expropriation notations and reallocation measures without a definitive legal settlement of ownership status or compensation. This has produced a complex housing reality and resulted in two distinct categories of affected persons. On the one hand, the land on which the neighborhood is situated remains registered –since the 1960s– in the names of original owners from Muadamiyat al-Sham, a predominantly Sunni area. Over time, however, the plot was subjected to both official and unofficial uses and allocations, without a completed judicial process to determine competing claims or to provide reparations for harm arising from earlier expropriation measures.

On the other hand, in the absence of a fair legal settlement addressing that historical phase, current residents –predominantly Alawite– gradually settled in the neighborhood over the years, including families who inherited occupancy of these homes. Today, they find themselves facing forced eviction measures lacking safeguards of review, compensation, or alternative shelter. This reveals a dual pattern of victimization:

- **Original owners (Sunni)** who were previously harmed by expropriation measures that were not accompanied by full compensation or lawful settlement; and

- **Current residents (Alawite)** who are now subjected to forcible removal outside any legitimate judicial or administrative process.

In addition to these two groups, a Syrian government official from the Ministry of Interior stated ([to al-Modon newspaper](#)) that “the al-Sumaria area is among the usurped properties whose possession belongs to the State. The former regime had carved it out from the town of Muadamiyat al-Sham and its surroundings to make it special housing for sectarian military and security formations. It was granted to what was known as the Defense Companies, founded by Rifaat al-Assad, brother of Hafez al-Assad, before being placed under the control of the Fourth Division and the Air Force Intelligence Branch... A large portion of these dwellings originally belong to the Ministry of Defense, while other parts belong to intelligence branches and security institutions. Accordingly, they constitute State property, and following the dissolution of these agencies, ownership of these dwellings was returned to the State’s disposition.”

This context underscores that the recent coercive measures did not resolve the historical property dispute nor establish a balanced legal mechanism for reconciling competing rights. Instead, they introduced a new layer of harm through forced displacement carried out without compensation or an individualized legal assessment of occupants’ status. From a human rights perspective, addressing an accumulated property dispute through force and coercion—rather than through formal mechanisms for adjudication, compensation, and housing alternatives—results in a compounded violation of the right to property, the right to adequate housing, and the right to access effective remedies for all affected groups.

8. Legal Dimensions

International law recognizes the right of individuals and entities to own property—both tangible and intangible—and to use, benefit from, and dispose of it in accordance with applicable legal frameworks. This right constitutes a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of both economic and social structures. International law also protects the right to adequate housing as an extension of human dignity, as reflected in several international instruments, including the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (articles 17 and 25), the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (articles 11 and 17), the [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#) (article 17), and the Convention on the [Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (article 14). Under these standards, attacks on homes and their contents, or the forcible deprivation of owners of the use of their property, constitutes a clear violation of the rights to property and adequate housing.

In the same context, the documented testimonies indicate that some residents were subjected to insults and physical assaults by armed elements wearing General Security uniforms. Such practices fall within the prohibition of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 5), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (article 7), and [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#), in addition to relevant norms contained in [the four Geneva Conventions](#) and their 1977 Additional Protocols.

The coercive displacement of families amounts to the crime of forced displacement, prohibited under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 9), the [Fourth Geneva Convention](#) (article 49), and [Additional Protocol II](#) (article 17). Under the [Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court](#), forced displacement is classified as a war crime or a crime against humanity (articles 7 and 8).

In this regard, the violations documented cannot be justified on the basis that some individuals were previously affiliated with military or civilian structures connected to the former regime. A significant proportion of victims are women and children, and members of the armed forces who refrained from fighting or laid down their arms constitute persons *hors de combat* under [Common Article 3](#) of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949. They must be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction. The Fourth Geneva Convention also prohibits the arbitrary seizure or confiscation of their property (article 46).

At the domestic level, the practices documented in this report contradict the Syrian [Constitutional Declaration](#) issued in March 2025, which affirms the inviolability of private property (article 16) and provides that all rights and freedoms enshrined in international human rights treaties, charters, and conventions form an integral part of the Declaration (article 12). Accordingly, violations of physical integrity, exposure to degrading treatment, torture, or arbitrary arrest constitute direct breaches of the core constitutional framework. Moreover, targeting occupants on the basis of sectarian affiliation contravenes the principle of equality set out in the Constitutional Declaration (article 10).

Applicable Syrian law provides that the right to use, exploit, and dispose of real property is reserved to the owner under the [Syrian Civil Code](#), and that expropriation may only occur within a clear legal framework and in return for fair compensation. Lease contracts likewise confer upon tenants the right to benefit from a property in exchange for an agreed rent. In addition, housing established pursuant to [Legislative Decree No. 12 of 1975](#) concerning the Military Housing Establishment –including al-Sumaria housing– may be owned or leased by non-military persons, as the applicable legal framework permits transfer of ownership to third parties upon full payment of the price and the lapse of the legally prescribed period.

Further, the seizure of housing units in al-Sumaria by armed elements constitutes the offence of unlawful usurpation of real property under the [Syrian Penal Code](#) (article 723), with aggravated penalties where the act is committed through violence or threats, or involves the participation of armed persons, potentially resulting in imprisonment of up to three years. The seizure of furniture and movable property without legal basis further constitutes theft with violence or aggravated theft under articles 624 and 625 of the Syrian Penal Code.

9. Judicial Avenues for Addressing Housing and Property Disputes in al-Sumaria

If the properties addressed in this report are owned by natural or legal persons, as indicated in some of the sources relied upon, Syrian legislation provides substantive legal remedies to address cases of unlawful seizure. An affected party –whether a natural person or a legal entity such as a governorate or municipality– may resort to the judiciary by filing an action to prevent

interference and seek restitution of the property. This action is grounded in the absolute evidentiary force of the Land Registry under the Syrian Civil Code (article 825), as well as the owner's full right to dispose of, exploit, and use their property (article 768). Under this avenue, the court issues a judgment confirming the claimant's ownership and ordering the offending party to vacate and surrender the property, under the supervision of the Enforcement Department, which is authorized to seek the assistance of public force to ensure the rule of law.

In cases requiring urgent protection, the law also allows the owner to file an expedited action for the eviction of a usurper and restitution of the property before the summary judge, pursuant to the [Code of Civil Procedure](#) (article 79). This remedy is distinguished by its timeliness, as judgments issued therein are enforceable immediately by operation of law (article 292), thereby ensuring the recovery of property without awaiting the exhaustion of appeal procedures. As for possessory actions, although they exist in law, they remain procedurally challenging, requiring proof of strict conditions regarding prior possession and must be filed within a one-year limitation period from the date of usurpation, rendering them a less flexible option for owners in contexts of coercive seizure.

The availability of these lawful judicial channels undermines any justification for resorting to arbitrary raids or security-based extortion. Replacing judicial rulings with arbitrary detention, or bargaining for the release of detainees in exchange for immediate eviction from the properties they occupy, constitutes a blatant violation of Syrian law, prior to, and in addition to, international legal standards. Accordingly, giving effect to the concept of a "State governed by law," as invoked by the Governor of Damascus during his meeting with a group of al-Sumaria residents, requires the immediate cessation of these abuses, the accountability of perpetrators, and the return of such disputes to the competent judiciary, which must safeguard property rights and uphold human dignity.

10. Recommendations

The documentation and reporting reviewed indicate that the events in al-Sumaria constitute a complex case of identity-based forced eviction, accompanied by ill-treatment, arbitrary arrest, and the erosion of procedural safeguards. This has resulted in concurrent violations of the rights to adequate housing, property, liberty, and personal security, and calls for an independent investigation, the identification of institutional and command responsibility, and the provision of reparations. Accordingly, STJ recommends:

- Immediately halt forced evictions and suspend any measures affecting housing or property in al-Sumaria until a clear, lawful framework is established, subject to individualized review. Any enforcement measures must exclude the use of force and be carried out under judicial supervision and oversight.
- Ensure that any future eviction- or property-related measures are based exclusively on judicial decisions and accompanied by full procedural guarantees, including adequate notice, reasonable timeframes, the right to appeal, and civilian oversight. Measures should also ensure access to effective remedies and legal assistance, and include safeguards to prevent recurrence.

- Launch an independent and transparent investigation to determine institutional and command responsibility for arbitrary arrest, ill-treatment, forced eviction, and property seizure in al-Sumaria, and ensure accountability for perpetrators in accordance with the law.
 - Establish an independent national/local mechanism to address housing, land, and property (HLP) issues in the area, taking into account the historical context of the property dispute and balancing the State's regulatory role with the rights of original owners and current occupants. The mechanism should ensure disputes are resolved through judicial processes rather than coercion, and should guarantee meaningful participation of victims from all affected groups as well as civil society organizations.
 - Expand the personal jurisdiction of the Transitional Justice Commission to cover violations committed by all parties –not only those attributed to the former regime– and extend the temporal scope to include violations committed up to the date of the adoption of the Transitional Justice Law by the People's Assembly.
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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.

ABOUT Ceasefire



The Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights aims to empower civilians in situations of armed conflict or prevailing insecurity to document violations of their rights; to seek justice and accountability for violations of civilian rights; and to develop the practice of civilian rights protection and raise public support for the promotion of civilian rights.

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