

Syria/Hama: Armed Intimidation and Sectarian Discourse, Marking the First Anniversary of the Assad Regime's Fall



This Report Documents Threats And Armed Violence Targeting Alawite And Christian Communities During Commemorations Of The “Liberation” Anniversary. It Examines The Resulting Climate Of Fear And The Erosion Of The Population’s Sense Of Safety And Security, While Highlighting Inadequate Protection Measures And The Effective Absence Of Intervention And Deterrence Mechanisms By The Transitional Authorities.





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This report documents threats and armed violence targeting Alawite and Christian communities during commemorations of the “liberation” anniversary. It examines the resulting climate of fear and the erosion of the population’s sense of safety and security, while highlighting inadequate protection measures and the effective absence of intervention and deterrence mechanisms by the transitional authorities.



1. Introduction

On 7 and 8 December 2025, several areas of Hama Governorate witnessed incidents that coincided with the first anniversary of the fall of the Assad regime (the “liberation”). According to eyewitness accounts, these incidents were accompanied by an armed presence and the use of insulting or sectarian-loaded expressions in and around civilian gatherings and neighbourhoods. This report documents these incidents and analyses the recurrent practices emerging from cross-checked testimonies. It further assesses their psychological and social impact on affected communities, as well as the protection and non-recurrence obligations incumbent upon the transitional government under relevant legal standards.

This report forms part of broader efforts to understand the continuing risks to community safety in the post-conflict context, to highlight the impact of the documented events on affected communities, and to underscore the responsibility of relevant authorities to prevent identity-based violence, counter hate speech and sectarian discourse in the post-Assad period, and protect civilian gatherings from manifestations of armed proliferation.

For the purposes of this report, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) conducted six in-depth interviews with witnesses who were present at the locations of the incidents. Participants provided informed consent after being briefed on the voluntary nature of their participation and the intended use of the information they provided, including the incorporation of excerpts from their testimonies in this report. Witnesses requested that their identities and any identifying details be withheld, fearing reprisals against themselves or their families. Accordingly, the report refers to individuals cited through their testimonies using initials only.

2. Incidents of Armed Intimidation and Abusive Discourse in Civilian Areas of Hama during the “Liberation” Commemorations

The incidents addressed in this section occurred in different contexts, yet share a common feature: they took place in spaces where civilians ordinarily gather in their daily lives —such as public squares and residential neighbourhoods in Hama— specifically in Tuwaym village, Jubb Ramlah town, and the city of As Suqaylabiyah. These areas are predominantly inhabited by Christians and members of the Alawite community. Based on testimonies, STJ documented the use of weapons to intimidate residents, attacks on homes, gunfire directed at civilian populations, and the use of degrading and abusive language, all in the context of celebrations marking the fall of the former regime.

The following paragraphs provide a focused account of each incident as narrated by witnesses, highlighting its temporal and geographic context and the nature of the risks it generated at both the individual and community levels.

2.1. Armed Presence and Attacks on Civilian Homes – Tuwaym Village (8 December 2025)

In [Tuwaym](#) village, located west of Hama city and predominantly inhabited by members of the Alawite community, residents were subjected to incidents of collective intimidation involving the use of weapons and abusive language on the evening of 8 December 2025. Witness H.D. (a mother of four children whose husband, a civilian, was killed during the coastal events in March) recounted what happened as follows:

“Armed groups entered the village in the evening, arriving from neighbouring Sunni villages in cars and on motorcycles, under the pretext of celebrating the anniversary of the liberation... before heavy, indiscriminate gunfire began in the streets and alleyways.”

She added:

“The shooting continued for more than two hours... the gunmen then began moving between houses, shouting and insulting people, then pounding violently on doors. My children were trembling with fear... we all remained pressed together in the same corner of the room.”

According to the witness, the intimidation escalated further: the doors of some neighbours' homes were broken, and women inside their houses were subjected to degrading and contemptuous insults, including:

“You Alawites, you dogs... you are remnants of the regime... you pigs.”

Describing those moments, she stated:

“I was sitting with my children in the corner of the room... I put my hand over their heads so they would not feel afraid, as though our door would be next... every minute felt like a full hour.”

She concluded:

“There was no authority protecting people, and no one stopped this attack. We were simply waiting for the night to end, hoping we would still be alive.”

2.2. Gunfire, Degrading Insults, and Forcing Residents to Celebrate – Jubb Ramlah (8 December 2025)

In his testimony to STJ, B.A. (a farmer and father of three) described the entry of a convoy of cars and motorcycles into the town of [Jubb Ramlah](#) in Hama –predominantly inhabited by members of the Alawite community– arriving from the direction of the

neighbouring village of Dimo (predominantly Sunni), located to the east. The convoy's arrival was accompanied by heavy gunfire in streets close to residential homes. The witness stated:

"Some members of the convoy shouted abusive slogans urging residents to come out and participate in the activities, such as: 'You dogs, you Alawites, you must come out on Liberation Day and celebrate.'"

He added:

"The shooting continued for nearly a full hour, during which residents experienced intense terror and fear. Families shut their doors, tightly closed windows, and gathered children in corners away from the danger. Everyone was haunted by the fear that the town's previous large-scale massacre could be repeated."

2.3. Attack on "Liberation" Anniversary Celebrations in As Suqaylabiyah (7 December 2025)

Several testimonies collected by STJ indicate that an incident of armed violence occurred in the vicinity of the celebration square and al-Meshwar Street in [As Suqaylabiyah](#) —a predominantly Christian city in Hama— on the evening of 7 December 2025.

According to testimony documented from R.S. (a nurse):

"The evening began in a celebratory atmosphere, as the city seemed to be regaining its breath, until motorcycles entered, driven by young men arriving from the direction of Qal'at al-Madiq village, which immediately generated tension among those present."

These details were also confirmed by witness Z.A. (an employee), who stated:

"Two motorcycles entered the square at very high speed, before one of the young men began firing into the air while shouting sectarian slogans, including: 'Worshippers of the Cross, you are Mekawi'in [turncoats] ,¹ you have no right to celebrate Liberation Day.'"

In another account, witness H.J. (a teacher) said:

¹ The term "*Mekawi'in*" became widespread in Syria following the fall of the Assad regime. It has been used to describe supporters of President Assad who suddenly shifted their stance —from praising him to criticizing him— and who expressed joy at his departure and the end of his rule.

"I noticed someone moving nervously within the crowd. He then stood in the middle of the square and shouted loudly: 'Worshippers of the Cross, you are Mekawi'in,' before raising a weapon and firing indiscriminately, then fleeing through nearby alleyways."

According to the testimonies, the incident triggered widespread panic and distress. Witness R.S. described the scene as follows:

"Gunfire echoed across the area, and people's screams rose as they ran. Everyone in the café tried to go down to the basement or take cover behind walls. Within seconds, a loud explosion shook the place, and people began shouting that a grenade had been thrown into the square. No one dared go outside or approach the windows, and fear came to dominate everything."

3. Psychological and Social Impact on Affected Communities

The documented incidents demonstrate that their impact is not confined to the immediate fear experienced during their occurrence, but extends into a state of chronic anxiety that reshapes residents' relationship with their daily lives and with neighbouring communities perceived as sectarian "others." According to testimonies, sudden episodes of gunfire and the presence of armed groups in the vicinity of homes and gathering places generated a pervasive sense of insecurity, across the neighbourhood, the street, and the household alike.

Witness R.S. described her feeling by saying: **"I felt as though fear had taken over my entire body,"** while H.D. summarised her anxiety as follows: **"Fear has come to accompany every detail of my day. Home is no longer a safe place, and the streets have become a constant source of threat."**

Testimonies further indicate that these feelings did not subside once the incidents ended; rather, they persisted in the form of heightened vigilance and avoidance of public spaces and squares where tensions had unfolded. R.S. stated: **"The incident taught me not to trust any place where there is a crowd or a gathering."**

The testimonies also reflect a particular impact on children, with references to severe fear and distress among them, and to women bearing the burden of reassurance and care within the home during moments of threat. H.D. described how her children were **"trembling at the sound of gunfire,"** and how she sat with them in the corner of the room in an effort to protect them.

In some cases, the violent gunfire and forceful pounding on doors triggered memories of earlier episodes of violence in these areas, deepening the psychological impact and giving it a cumulative dimension that extends beyond a single incident. In Jubb Ramlah, B.A. stated that **"the fear of another major massacre began to dominate everyone,"**

referring to [the March 2025 massacres against Alawites in Syria's coastal region](#). This suggests that past trauma is reactivated with each new incident.

At the social level, the recurrence of such incidents —even when they do not result in direct injuries— has contributed to undermining trust in public space, disrupting everyday life, and reinforcing a collective sense that danger may re-emerge without warning. This constitutes a core consequence of such practices, given their long-term implications for social cohesion and for the prospects of restoring a sense of stability in the post-conflict period. According to testimonies, these attacks directly erode the foundations of trust between different sectarian communities. As Z.A. noted, these incidents:

“Keep the spirit of sectarianism alive and end any hope of life returning to normal. Instead of building a shared future, these attacks entrench our divisions... They made me feel that the safety we have awaited for so long remains distant, and that the path toward peaceful coexistence will still require a long time.”

4. Analysis of Patterns of Violence and Intimidation during the “Liberation” Celebrations

The converging testimonies presented in this report indicate a recurring pattern of violent and intimidating practices across different locations —predominantly inhabited by Alawite or Christian communities— during commemorations marking the fall of the former regime. These incidents share a number of common features linked to place, timing, and the nature of the conduct observed. Most occurred in spaces closely connected to residents' everyday lives, including residential neighbourhoods and public squares, thereby heightening exposure to risk and deepening the psychological and social impact on affected populations. They also coincided with a public occasion of symbolic significance, which added an additional layer of meaning to the acts and transformed the space into an environment charged with tension and anxiety.

Testimonies further show that, in several instances, physical violence was accompanied by degrading or discriminatory discourse, occurring alongside gunfire or an armed presence in the vicinity of homes. This amplified the impact of these acts and gave them a dimension directly affecting the dignity and social belonging of the communities concerned. In addition, the repeated use of similar intimidation tactics is notable —such as collective movement on motorcycles or in car convoys and approaching homes' entrances or windows— further extending fear within both residential areas and the public sphere.

The report does not reach conclusions regarding the degree of coordination among those involved or the identity of the actors engaged in these practices. However, their

repetition across multiple locations, with closely similar characteristics, reflects a fragile environment in which intimidation can occur in the absence of effective deterrence or adequate protection safeguards.

5. Legal Framework and the State's Responsibility to Protect

The incidents documented in this report are inconsistent with a range of fundamental principles and obligations under Syrian and international law, particularly those relating to the protection of individuals' physical integrity, the prevention of violence in public spaces, and the prohibition of discrimination and incitement.

First, indiscriminate gunfire, the forced entry into homes, and the proliferation of weapons in the vicinity of civilian gatherings constitute infringements of the rights to life and personal security; rights guaranteed under the [Constitutional Declaration](#), the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), and the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#). Such conduct also falls within a pattern of threats that triggers the authorities' obligation to adopt preventive measures to protect individuals from foreseeable risks, including during public occasions and mass events.

Second, the use of degrading or discriminatory expressions may amount to hate speech or advocacy of hostility and violence, which is prohibited under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Covenant further affirms the duty of States to prevent and address such conduct effectively. These actions also contradict the principles of equality and non-discrimination set out in the Covenant and the Constitutional Declaration.

Accordingly, irrespective of whether any official entity is directly implicated in these acts, the State bears positive obligations grounded in due diligence to protect the population, prevent foreseeable attacks, investigate the incidents, hold perpetrators accountable, and guarantee non-recurrence. This includes strengthening protection measures in public spaces, enhancing rapid response mechanisms, and taking concrete steps to curb the proliferation of weapons and prevent identity-based incitement.

6. Recommendations

The testimonies and information indicate an urgent need to adopt more effective preventive measures to protect civilian gatherings and curb the proliferation of weapons during public occasions, alongside investigating the documented incidents and ensuring non-recurrence, in line with the authorities' legal obligations. Accordingly, STJ recommends the following:

6.1. To the Syrian Transitional Government

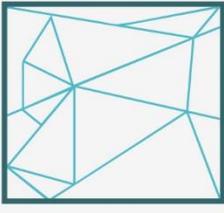
- Strengthen protection measures in public spaces –particularly during mass events and public celebrations– by enhancing preventive security deployment, monitoring, and rapid response mechanisms to address any conduct posing risks to civilians.
- Criminalize hate speech and sectarian incitement, and adopt deterrent legal measures against the use of exclusionary and degrading expressions documented in this report, which undermine social peace.
- Conduct serious investigations into the documented incidents and take the necessary measures to hold those involved accountable in accordance with due legal standards, ensuring victims' rights and access to justice.
- Prevent the proliferation of weapons and acts of violence in and around residential areas, and prohibit armed convoys or movements that may intimidate residents or threaten their safety.

6.2. To Civil Society Organizations and Local Actors

- Continue documenting similar incidents to monitor the evolution of these patterns over time and to provide an evidence base supporting accountability and prevention efforts.
- Implement initiatives to strengthen social trust and mitigate the cumulative impact of fear through psychosocial support programmes, local dialogue, and awareness-raising activities on residents' rights to safety and protection.

6.3. To International Partners and UN Bodies

- Support independent monitoring and documentation efforts and provide technical and financial resources to strengthen local capacity to collect and analyse data related to violence in public spaces.
 - Encourage the authorities to adopt preventive policies consistent with international standards, and follow up on the implementation of obligations related to the protection of civilians and the prevention of incitement and identity-based violence.
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ABOUT STJ

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) started as an idea in a co-founder's mind while attending the U.S. Middle-East Partnership Initiative's (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program (LDF) in 2015. The idea became a reality and flourished into an independent, non-profit, impartial, non-governmental human rights organization.

STJ's beginnings were more than humble; initially, it only reported stories of Syrians who experienced arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, or torture. Planted in fertile soil, the seed of this project grew into an established human rights organization licensed in the Middle East and the European Union. STJ today undertakes to detect and uncover violations of all types committed in all Syrian parts by the various parties to the conflict.

Convinced that Syria's diversity is a wealth, our researchers and volunteers serve with unfailing dedication to monitor, expose, and document human rights violations that continue unabated in Syria since 2011, regardless of the affiliation of the victims or perpetrators.