

Syria: USCIRF Annual Report Recommends Designating Syria as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC)



- Commission Links Engagement with Transitional Authorities to Tangible Progress in Religious Freedom, Equal Citizenship, and Minority Protection in Legislative and Electoral Bodies

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سوريون
من أجل
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Syrians
For Truth
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In its 2026 Annual [Report](#), the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) documented a significant decline in religious freedom conditions in Syria throughout 2025. The report emphasized that Syria’s religiously diverse populations struggled to recover after nearly fourteen years of civil war. It also noted that while the transitional authorities publicly rejected the sectarianism that characterized the ousted regime, they “exhibited systematic and ongoing tolerance for egregious violations of religious freedom” all year. The authorities failed to prevent mass killings, abductions, and other serious attacks targeting Alawites, Druze, Christians, and other religious minorities.

A Wave of Violence Targeting Minorities

The report documented that on 7 March 2025, thousands of Sunni fighters, either loyal to the transitional authorities or operating under the Ministry of Defense, mobilized under the pretext of countering a pro-regime Alawite insurgency along the Syrian coast. The report noted that these fighters carried out summary executions of Alawite civilians in Tartus, Latakia, and Hama, fueled by incitement to sectarian rhetoric, resulting in the death of at least 1,500 people within the first two days.

In April, armed forces opened fire on Druze residents in the Jaramana district of Damascus after social media claims accused a Druze leader of insulting the Prophet Muhammad, sparking deadly clashes that lasted for days.

Furthermore, the report highlighted a suicide attack targeting the Saint Elias Greek Orthodox Church in Damascus in June, which killed at least 25 Christians during Sunday Mass. In July 2025, the abduction of a Druze merchant in As Suwayda by Bedouin tribes triggered weeks of bloody confrontations, worsened by rising anti-Druze rhetoric in state-run media. The report emphasized that some of the fighters involved in the March massacres returned in July to commit similar atrocities against the Druze, bringing the total death toll to approximately 2,000.

Involvement of Security Forces and Lack of Accountability

The report revealed that investigations conducted by international bodies, including the United Nations, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch, found direct involvement of forces linked to the Ministries of Interior and Defense in extrajudicial killings targeting Alawites and Druze. It also documented the complicity of armed militants in abductions, torture, and killings affecting hundreds of individuals from the Alawite, Christian, and Druze communities.

Although investigative committees were formed following these events, the report noted that their findings were limited; some committees avoided implicating security personnel, and judicial proceedings against those involved were significantly delayed. Additionally, authorities failed to address cases of abduction and sexual assault against minority women, with ambiguity surrounding the identities of some perpetrators and their connections to the security forces.

Threats Across Diverse Regions of Syria

The report noted that in 2025, Idlib, the former stronghold of the transitional authorities in northwest Syria, remained a base for armed groups responsible for sectarian attacks across the country. Additionally, large areas of eastern Syria continued to be hostile to religious freedom, partly due to the resurgence of ISIS cells. In As Suwayda and along the Syrian coast, the report documented that Druze and Alawite communities faced ongoing waves of violent and sectarian threats.

In the mainly Kurdish, Christian, and Yazidi regions of northeast Syria, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) and the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued to operate under their inclusive model. However, Türkiye kept destabilizing the area through military strikes and support for armed factions accused of attacking Yazidis, Christians, and Assyrians. In March, Assyrian Christian sources reported that a Turkish attack hit the Mar Sawa Church in the village of Tal Tawil, a site that was destroyed by a similar strike three years earlier.

In June, the report cited human rights organizations stating that many fighters from Turkish-backed factions, integrated under the Transitional Ministry of Defense, remain active near Ayn al-Arab/Kobani. Finally, the report highlighted that at least 2,594 Yazidis have been missing since 2014 as a result of ISIS atrocities.

Rapid Shifts in U.S. Policy Toward Syria

On the level of U.S. policy, the report tracked a series of key changes, especially President Trump’s March announcement to lift sanctions on Syria, citing what he called “positive measures” by the new government. In July, Secretary of State Marco Rubio moved to delist Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). August also saw the first official bipartisan U.S. congressional delegation to Syria in years, including religious freedom activists and local community leaders.

In November, President Trump met President Ahmed al-Sharaa at the White House, the first meeting between the leaders of both nations since 1946. Right after the meeting, the Secretary of State issued a directive to suspend sanctions under the

Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act. The report also clarified that in December, Trump signed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which repeals Caesar Act sanctions, as long as the President periodically certifies that Syria is making concrete efforts to protect religious freedom. These efforts include removing foreign fighters from official positions and ensuring freedom of worship and political representation for minorities.

The report submitted the following recommendations to the U.S.

Administration and Congress:

For the U.S. administration:

- Designate Syria as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act;
- Impose targeted sanctions, including asset freezes and entry bans, on any Syrian responsible for violations of religious freedom;
- Condition engagement with transitional authorities on making tangible progress in religious freedom, including constitutional provisions for equal citizenship and protecting minorities within legislative and electoral bodies;
- Assist transitional authorities by providing specialized religious freedom training for military, security, and civilian leaders to address institutional sectarianism.

For the U.S. Congress:

- Send bipartisan congressional delegations to Syria to assess the state of religious freedom on the ground;
 - Tie sanctions relief to genuine improvements in religious freedom demonstrated by transitional authorities, including holding violators accountable and removing implicated fighters from the military.
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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.