

Al-Suqaylabiyah/Hama: Mass Violence in March 2026, Violations, and a Reconciliation Process that Ignores Rights



- STJ Calls On The Transitional Government To Ensure The Protection Of Civilians And Their Property, To Take Effective Measures To Prevent The Recurrence Of Violence, Firmly Address Any Negligence Or Abuses By Security Forces, And To Curb Hate Speech And Incitement

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1. Executive Summary

On 27 and 28 March 2026, the city of [Al-Suqaylabiyah](#) (a Christian-majority city in the western countryside of Hama) witnessed a security escalation characterized by acts of mass violence targeting civilians and private property.

The events erupted following an altercation in one of the city's streets between young men from al-Suqaylabiyah and others from the neighboring predominantly Sunni town of Qalaat al-Madiq, before rapidly escalating into collective violence involving acts of assault, vandalism, looting, and gunfire.

Data collected by Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) through in-depth interviews with witnesses and victims who directly experienced the events indicates that the escalation was linked to the entry of groups from outside the city amidst broad mobilization. This is supported by visual evidence showing the movement of these groups toward Al-Suqaylabiyah. Furthermore, some video clips document the utterance of threats and slurs directed at the Christian inhabitants of the area.

Regarding the role of security agencies, testimonies indicate that the presence of Public Security personnel at the scene was not accompanied by effective intervention to halt the attacks. On the contrary, several accounts report sightings of security personnel who refrained from intervening or even accompanied groups of the assailants. Certain visual materials corroborate these allegations, raising serious questions about the extent to which the relevant authorities fulfilled their legal obligation to protect civilians and their property.

In contrast, official authorities presented [a differing narrative](#), describing the events as a "group fight" that was contained through the intervention of security forces, and indicated that a number of those involved had been detained. They also later announced that a "local reconciliation agreement between Al-Suqaylabiyah and Qalaat al-Madiq" had been reached, which included the release of detainees, addressing the damages, and dropping legal claims related to the events.

Although this process contributed to de-escalating the tension, it raises questions regarding its adequacy in addressing the violations that occurred. This is particularly evident given the absence of any indications that an independent investigation has been opened into allegations of complicity or inaction by security agencies, alongside the consequent risks of impunity and the recurrence of such violations.

The report concludes that the events in Al-Suqaylabiyah reflect a pattern of mass violence targeting civilians and their property, within a context of rapid escalation and communal tension. It emphasizes the necessity of conducting transparent and independent investigations, ensuring accountability for those responsible for the violations, and adopting effective measures to prevent their recurrence.

For the purpose of drafting this report, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) conducted 13 in-depth interviews with witnesses and victims who directly experienced the events, between March 28 and April 2, 2026. The researchers obtained informed consent from all participants after explaining the voluntary nature of their participation and the intended use of the information, including the publication of this report. At their request, pseudonyms were used and any identifying details were withheld due to potential security risks.

2. The Triggering Incident and the Path toward Escalation

According to the testimonies documented by STJ, the events began on "Al-Mishwar" Street, one of the vital thoroughfares in Al-Suqaylabiyah. The accounts indicate that an altercation broke out between youths from Al-Suqaylabiyah and others from the town of Qalaat al-Madiq, triggered by the verbal harassment of young women from the area. This occurred within a context that some testimonies describe as recurrent in previous periods, albeit without reaching the level of escalation witnessed in this incident.

"Samer" who was present at the scene at the time of the incident, states:

"On Friday, March 27, 2026, youths from the village of Qalaat al-Madiq entered Al-Mishwar Street. While walking down the street, they intercepted two young women and verbally harassed them, at which point youths from Al-Suqaylabiyah intervened."

This account is corroborated by the testimony of "Toni," who explained:

"Three youths riding a single motorcycle stopped, and one of them grabbed a young woman's hand, attempting to pull her by force while directing inappropriate remarks at her that included an explicit invitation to accompany him [...] before the situation escalated and he pulled out a hand grenade, threatening those present."

"Ghassan" who was standing in a position that allowed him to closely hear and observe what happened, stated:

"The young man told her verbatim: 'Get on [Referring to the motorcycle], let's have some fun!'"

Several [open sources](#) and [social media pages](#) indicate that one of the youths who harassed the young woman —who is a member of the Public Security apparatus— sustained a blow to the head during this incident and was later transferred to the hospital to receive treatment.

After the incident rapidly escalated beyond the scope of a simple altercation, taking on a highly dangerous nature that directly threatened the safety of civilians, Public Security personnel arrived at the scene. However, testimonies do not suggest that this intervention contributed to an effective containment of the situation or prevented its development. Rather, corroborating accounts indicate that the events took an escalatory turn shortly after the altercation was broken up, transitioning from a limited confrontation to broader acts of assault.

In this context, "Samer" adds:

"Shortly after the altercation was broken up, five youths from the village of Qalaat al-Madiq arrived, armed with sticks and knives, and began breaking and smashing the furniture in the 'Cello' restaurant where I was present. I went to the nearest security patrol, which was only a few meters away, and told one of the personnel what had happened. He replied: 'Get lost' [...] Later, I saw the same patrol accompanying the five youths during their attacks."

The matter was not limited to the absence of intervention to stop the assault; it extended to allowing the space for them to continue. The witness adds:

"Once the youths were certain that the security personnel would not stop them, they called their relatives and acquaintances in Qalaat al-Madiq to join them."

These findings indicate that the absence of effective deterrence at this stage contributed to expanding the scope of the attacks by summoning additional groups, leading to the transition of the events from a limited altercation into a more organized and widespread collective escalation.

3. The Expansion of Attacks and their Transition into Collective Violence

The trajectory of events was not limited to the expanding scope of the initial altercation; rather, it transitioned within a short timeframe into a level of relatively organized mass violence. This involved the influx of large groups from outside the city—believed to be from the town of Qalaat al-Madiq and its vicinity—into Al-Suqaylabiyah. Testimonies indicate that this expansion was not spontaneous but occurred within the context of a clear mobilization, facilitated by the use of cars and motorcycles, without encountering any interception by the security checkpoints stationed at the city's entrances.

In this context, "Ghassan" states:

"Groups from outside the city entered using a large number of cars and motorcycles without being intercepted by the security checkpoints located at its entrances."

Following the entry of these groups, the events escalated into a widespread wave of attacks directly targeting [civilian property and individuals](#). These attacks assumed a random and pervasive nature across multiple neighborhoods within the city. "George" describes this transition, stating:

"Storefronts and cars parked in the streets were smashed, and a hand grenade was thrown at a residential building [...] In the evening, we heard gunfire directed at shops, restaurants, and cafes."

Furthermore, Issa's testimony reflects the level and scope of the violence employed, reporting:

"Suddenly, I saw more than fifty individuals rushing towards me inside the shop. They beat me with sticks while the others began breaking and vandalizing the shop's contents [...] I could not defend myself due to their numbers."

These attacks were not limited to material damage but extended to include direct physical assaults, as in the case described by "Hazar" who indicated that a civilian was severely beaten and had his property stolen in the presence of nearby security personnel. She stated:

"I saw them attacking a young man riding his motorcycle. These groups beat him violently and directed highly offensive slurs at him that I am too ashamed to mention, and then proceeded to steal his motorcycle after the assault... What caused me profound astonishment and deep anxiety was that these attacks occurred in the presence of Public Security vehicles and personnel, without any effective measure being taken to stop what was happening; rather, it appeared as though these groups were moving under the protection of this security presence."

These accounts demonstrate that the violence was not confined to the public sphere but extended its impact into homes, where several witnesses reported a state of severe panic and fear that compelled them to take shelter inside closed rooms for hours. "Hasan" states:

"We heard intense, close-range gunfire accompanied by shouting and religiously motivated slurs directed against Christians [...] We were forced to go into an inner room and take shelter there for hours, unable to approach the windows for fear of being shot."

On the other hand, there are clear indications that these attacks took on a discriminatory nature or were linked to religious identity, as testimonies indicate the utterance of offensive remarks during the attacks, as well as the presence of selective behavior in certain cases. "Hanna" states:

"When they attempted to break into my neighbor's shop, he shouted that he was Sunni, so they left him alone and proceeded to vandalize the rest of the property."

Furthermore, the targeting of religious symbols was documented, including gunfire directed at a statue of the Virgin Mary, which carries implications beyond material damage and points to symbolic dimensions associated with identity and religious affiliation.

In their entirety, these incidents reflect the transition of events from a limited altercation into a wave of widespread collective violence, characterized by intensity, multiplicity in patterns of attack, and geographical expansion. This occurred within a context that reinforced the residents' sense of insecurity and revealed alarming indicators regarding the potential for this type of escalation to recur in the absence of effective deterrence.

On the following day, March 28, the residents of Al-Suqaylabiyah organized [a sit-in protest](#) rejecting the attacks they had been subjected to, as an expression of the state of fear left by the events. The protesters raised several slogans, including "The Syrian media is lying" and "We demand the accountability of the involved Public Security personnel," indicating their condemnation of what they described as the misleading media coverage provided by official and pro-government media, which claimed that what had occurred was limited to an altercation among youths, and that security forces had intervened to break it up.

In parallel, testimonies indicate counter-movements from the town of Qalaat al-Madiq, which included gatherings of armed individuals heading toward the city, within a context reflecting a continued state of alert. These accounts are corroborated by visual materials circulated on social media, reviewed by STJ, showing [mobilizations and movements](#) of groups [from outside Al-Suqaylabiyah heading toward it](#), some of which were documented via live broadcasts. According to documented testimonies, these movements concentrated on the northern side of the city, where a Public Security checkpoint prevented their entry into Al-Suqaylabiyah. This is contrary to what happened on the previous day, when similar groups managed to enter the city despite the presence of security posts, a fact confirmed by multiple testimonies.

4. Containing Tensions Through Reconciliation Amid the Absence of Accountability

Following these developments, official authorities and certain local actors moved [to contain the tension](#) through a "local reconciliation process," in which community leaders and notables from the cities of Al-Suqaylabiyah and Qalaat al-Madiq participated, alongside representatives of the local administration and security agencies. According to [official media reports](#), several consecutive sessions were held, culminating in the signing of a final "[consensual reconciliation deed](#)" [Referring to an out-of-court customary settlement] between the two parties on April 11, in the presence of an official committee tasked with following up on the file, chaired by the Director of the Al-Ghab District.

Published data indicates that the agreement included a set of measures, notably the formation of a committee to assess damages and work on compensating affected individuals, in addition to the release of a number of detainees and the dropping of legal claims related to the events. This was framed as an endeavor to promote "civil peace" and prevent the renewal of tension. The official narrative also emphasized that this process followed a security intervention to contain a "group fight," and that this intervention contributed to restoring stability to the area.

However, despite its role in de-escalating the tension and escalation, this process raises fundamental questions regarding its adequacy in addressing the violations documented by the testimonies, particularly concerning the widespread acts of violence that targeted civilians and private property, and the nature of responsibility for them. Furthermore, the inclusion of clauses in the agreement such as the dropping of legal claims raises problematic issues regarding the possibility of holding those responsible for these acts accountable.

Moreover, the available data does not indicate that any official measures or reactions were taken regarding the manifestations of incitement and mobilization that preceded and accompanied the events, including the summoning of groups from outside the city to participate in the attacks. Testimonies and available materials demonstrate that this discourse entailed explicit, religiously motivated inflammatory remarks inciting violence, which constitutes a highly alarming indicator of the potential for this rhetoric to translate into acts of collective violence. The absence of any accountability for these acts exacerbates fears of cementing an environment that permits the recurrence of such violations and the subsequent potential for renewed violence. In particular, reducing what occurred to a mere incidental altercation without addressing the actual causes that led to the escalation renders any similar incident a probable gateway to a new escalation.

Likewise, the official narrative made no mention of opening an independent or transparent investigation into the allegations regarding the complicity or inaction of security agency personnel during the events, despite these allegations appearing repeatedly in the testimonies. The absence of such measures heightens concerns regarding the limits of accountability and its impact on guaranteeing the non-recurrence of violations in the future. It is worth noting that, according to the witnesses spoken to by STJ, none of the victims had been compensated up to the time of drafting this report.

5. Patterns of Violations Documented in the Testimonies

The facts documented in this report reveal overlapping patterns of violations that affected several fundamental rights, primarily the right to physical integrity, the right to property, the right to protection from violence, and the right to freedom of religion and belief, in addition to the right to protection from discrimination. These violations contradict what is affirmed in the applicable Syrian legislation, foremost the Constitutional Declaration, as well as relevant international conventions and covenants.

Testimonies have shown that civilians were subjected to direct physical assaults, including beatings using sticks and solid objects, as in the case of "Issa." This falls under violations of the right to physical integrity and reflects a use of force outside any legal framework.

In parallel, attacks targeted private property on a wide scale, including shops, restaurants, and vehicles, which were smashed and severely damaged, in addition to incidents of looting and theft. This pattern of acts constitutes a direct violation of the right to property and, if proven to be widespread or recurrent, amounts to prohibited acts of pillaging and looting, particularly when carried out collectively and haphazardly.

Accounts also indicate the use of dangerous means of violence in a civilian vicinity, including an attempt to use a hand grenade and throwing another at a residential building, in addition to gunfire directed at civilian property. This reflects a direct endangerment of the lives and safety of civilians and indicates a high level of disregard for the safety of the residents.

On the other hand, alarming indicators emerge that the attacks took on a discriminatory nature, as one testimony reported that a shop was spared from being targeted after its owner declared his religious affiliation, whereas other properties were targeted. Furthermore, gunfire directed at a religious symbol was documented, which carries implications beyond material damage and confirms the existence of discriminatory dimensions associated with religious identity. These indicators are reinforced by [video clips circulated on social media](#), reviewed by STJ, one of which shows individuals among

the groups participating in the attacks uttering religiously motivated threats, including calls for the mass killing of Al-Suqaylabiyah residents.

In their entirety, these patterns of violations reflect the transition of events from a limited altercation to a wave of collective violence, characterized by its widespread scope and the multiplicity of its forms, directly targeting civilians and their property, within a context of an absence of effective protection to prevent or mitigate their occurrence.

6. The Role of Security forces:

The documented facts raise serious questions regarding the role of security forces during the events, particularly in light of the multiplicity of testimonies indicating that the presence of Public Security personnel at the scene was not accompanied by effective intervention to prevent or mitigate the attacks. While security patrols arrived at the scene following the initial altercation, testimonies report that subsequent attacks occurred and continued in the presence of these forces, without adequate measures being taken to stop them or disperse the assailants.

Some testimonies go further, reporting direct sightings of security personnel accompanying groups of assailants during their movements within the city. One witness stated that he saw a nearby security patrol refuse to respond to a request for intervention, before later observing it accompanying the same group while they carried out the attacks.

These accounts are corroborated by visual materials circulated on [social media](#), reviewed by STJ, showing the movement of Public Security vehicles coinciding with the entry of groups into the city, and [in some cases, directly alongside them](#). This raises serious concerns regarding the nature of the role these forces played during the events.

In this context, the security agencies' failure to effectively intervene to protect civilians and their property constitutes a breach of their mandated duty to protect. Meanwhile, any conduct involving the facilitation or condonation of the attacks, or participation therein, raises serious questions regarding the extent of compliance with legal obligations related to maintaining security, ensuring respect for the law, and preventing the occurrence of violations.

In contrast, the official narrative denies this depiction, asserting that security forces intervened to contain what it described as a "group fight," that they detained a number of those involved, and that they contributed to restoring calm to the area. However, this discrepancy between the official narrative and the circulated testimonies and visual materials reinforces the need for an independent and transparent investigation into the nature of the security agencies' role during the events.

7. Previous Incidents Reflecting a Recurrent Pattern of Violence and Incitement in Al-Suqaylabiyah

The events witnessed in Al-Suqaylabiyah on March 27 and 28, 2026, do not appear isolated from a broader context of previous incidents that the city experienced during the preceding months. Some of these incidents were characterized by [a violent or inflammatory nature](#), targeting civilian gatherings or public spaces frequented by residents.

On December 7, 2025, during a civilian gathering to celebrate the anniversary of the "Liberation of Syria," one testimony reported that an individual uttered religiously motivated remarks before opening fire haphazardly at the attendees, causing a state of panic among civilians. Another female witness stated that she heard phrases such as "**worshippers of the cross**" before the gunfire began, forcing those present to flee and take shelter.

In another incident on the same day, a second testimony reported that a group of youths arrived from the town of Qalaat al-Madiq and entered "Al-Mishwar" Street. The testimony explains that the atmosphere shifted within moments from a state of relative calm into total chaos, as the youths began firing heavily, before the sound of an explosion resulting from a grenade thrown into the gathering was heard. This compelled civilians to flee and take shelter inside buildings and shops or in basements, amid a state of severe panic that persisted even after the gunfire ceased.

Furthermore, testimonies documented by STJ indicate that incidents of harassment and annoyance in Al-Suqaylabiyah have recurred since the beginning of 2025. Residents documented numerous cases of groups from outside the city entering and publicly harassing young women, without an effective intervention to deter these behaviors, which contributed to creating a state of accumulated tension within the local community. The witness "Reem" indicated that these youths had been flocking in on motorcycles, driving them in an ostentatious manner since the beginning of last year, adding:

"Initially, we thought it was just passing adolescence, but the matter rapidly escalated into a daily, alarming phenomenon. We began to notice indecent behaviors: hurling profanities at young women, public harassment, and it even reached the point of stalking young women, directing degrading epithets at them, and sometimes deliberately intercepting their path."

The witness points out that the authorities' failure to deal with the matter allowed these youths to continue their harassment:

"In mid-April of last year, a young woman in her twenties, walking accompanied by her mother, was subjected to public insults by one of the youths, while another attempted to film her in a provocative manner, without any intervention from those present out of fear of escalation. Despite our continuous appeals to the security forces and the writing of collective complaints by the residents, adequate measures were not taken. Instead, a symbolic security checkpoint was placed at the entrance of the street, but it did not prevent the recurrence of the incidents."

In light of these testimonies, the events of March 2026 appear to be an extension of an accumulation of incidents characterized by the use of violence or the threat thereof in civilian areas, and the emergence of patterns of inflammatory or discriminatory behavior, alongside a weak preventive response. This contributed to creating an environment susceptible to rapid escalation, rather than it being an isolated or sudden incident.

8. Recommendations

Based on the data and testimonies presented in this report, and considering the responsibility of the Transitional Authority to ensure the protection of civilians, prevent the recurrence of violations, and hold perpetrators accountable, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) presents the following recommendations:

- Open an independent and transparent investigation into the events in Al-Suqaylabiyah on 27 and 28 March 2026, encompassing all documented violations, including acts of violence and attacks on property, and publish its results publicly.
- Investigate the allegations regarding the inaction or complicity of security agency personnel during the events, and hold accountable any official proven to be negligent or complicit, thereby ensuring there is no impunity.
- Ensure the protection of civilians and their property in situations of tension, and take immediate and effective measures to prevent the recurrence of such attacks.
- Refrain from utilizing local reconciliation mechanisms as a substitute for legal accountability, and ensure that settlements such as the dropping of legal claims do not obstruct the realization of justice or deprive victims of their right to a remedy. This includes ensuring the right of the affected individuals to obtain fair and effective reparations for the damages they sustained, whether material (such as the vandalization of property or loss of sources of income) or moral (such as psychological harm and fear). This should be achieved through clear and transparent mechanisms for assessing damages, determining responsibilities, and disbursing reparations without discrimination.



- Take clear measures to prevent hate speech and incitement to violence, including monitoring and holding accountable individuals who issue threats of a discriminatory nature, especially when directed against groups on a religious or sectarian basis.
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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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