Geneva, Switzerland STJ's Full Statement at Syria's UPR Pre-session

سوريون من أجل الحقيقة والعدالة

Syrians For Truth & Justice

- STJ Urged States To Put Forward Recommendations To Ensure Transitional Justice For All Victims, Accountability For Violations, Equality And Participation, Property Restitution, And Safe Return

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On 17 November 2026, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) participated in the pre-session on Syria for the 54th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Organised by UPR Info at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, the event brought together State delegations, a representative of Syria and civil society organisations, several weeks ahead of Syria's formal review before the United Nations Human Rights Council in January 2027.

STJ's participation followed its submission of several human rights reports to this UN mechanism. These included an independent, detailed report on the state of minority rights in Syria and ways to protect them; a joint submission with other eleven human rights organisations; a joint report with the Euro-Mediterranean Federation against Enforced Disappearances and the Committees for the Defence of Democratic Freedoms and Human Rights in Syria; a stakeholders' report on the death penalty; and a joint submission with Syrian organisations on statelessness and internal displacement.

The pre-sessions provide a key opportunity for civil society organisations to present their documentation and evidence directly to State representatives and build support for States to take up their recommendations and put them to Syria during the UPR. This helps give greater prominence to justice and the protection of Syria's diversity in the recommendations addressed to the country.

Speaking on behalf of the organisation, STJ Director Mr Bassam Alahmad delivered a statement focusing on three themes: protection and accountability; equality and participation; and displacement and property rights. The full statement follows:

Thank you, Chair. I speak on behalf of Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), an independent Syrian human rights organisation. We submitted an individual report on minority rights for this UPR, based on interviews, verified open sources and legal analysis.

We welcome the national UPR consultation held in Damascus on 14 November. However, greater transparency in **participant** selection and broader civil society representation are needed to ensure meaningful and inclusive participation.

I will address in this intervention protection and accountability, equality and participation, and displacement and property rights.

First, Protection and accountability:

In 2022, Syria supported Estonia's recommendation to investigate human rights violations and **prosecute** perpetrators.[1]

Since December 2024, STJ has documented **repeated** violations against Alawite, Druze, Kurdish and Christian communities. The UN Commission of Inquiry reported

[1] UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/50/6 (2022), recommendation 133.163 (Estonia). See also Addendum, A/HRC/50/6/Add.1, recording Syria's support for this recommendation.

approximately 1,400 deaths, **mostly** civilians, in the March 2025 coastal violence, and over 1,700 deaths in Suwayda that July.[2]

Government forces and affiliated fighters committed grave violations against Druze civilians; local Druze armed groups attacked Bedouin civilians.

The UN Commission also investigated the abduction of 21 women and girls, mostly Alawites, in 2025; at least eight suffered sexual violence.[3]

In al-Suqaylabiyah, STJ documented assaults on Christian residents, looting and **religiously motivated threats**, while security forces failed to intervene effectively.

The coastal committee referred **298** suspects for **prosecution**, but only a summary of its findings was made public, leaving possible command responsibility **unaddressed**.

Meanwhile, the Suwayda committee's ties to the **executive branch** and lack of clear protections for survivors raised concerns about **its** independence.

Decree No. 20 of 2025 limits the mandate of the National Commission for Transitional Justice to violations attributed to the former government.

We urge **States** to recommend that Syria expand this mandate before adopting transitional justice legislation, covering all victims and violations without discrimination. Syria should conduct independent, victim-centred investigations and **publish** comprehensive findings and **prosecution** statistics by the UPR mid-term review.

Within twelve months, all military and security formations should come under a public chain of command and independent civilian **oversight**, with individual human rights **vetting**.

Second, Equality and participation

Syria also supported recommendations to **remove provisions** discriminating against minorities and fully involve religious and ethnic groups in transparent, inclusive negotiations.[4]

Nevertheless, the Constitutional Declaration **contains** general equality guarantees, **yet lacks enforceable protections** for **pluralism** and requires the President to be Muslim.

Decree No. 13 of 2026 recognised Nowruz and Kurdish linguistic and cultural diversity and **prohibited** ethnic and linguistic discrimination.

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[2] Independent International Commission of Inquiry, A/HRC/61/CRP.7, 27 March 2026.

[3] Independent International Commission of Inquiry, A/HRC/61/62, 12 March 2026.

[4] UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/50/6 (2022), recommendations 133.89 (Lithuania) and 133.93 (Holy See). See also Addendum, A/HRC/50/6/Add.1, recording Syria's support for both recommendations.

Yet, during Nowruz 2026 in Afrin, STJ documented beatings of Kurdish **celebrants**, attacks on vehicles and forced **trampling** of Kurdish flags, while security forces present failed to intervene effectively.[5]

We urge States to recommend an inclusive review of the Constitutional Declaration and electoral framework before a permanent constitution or **nationwide** elections, ensuring meaningful participation and removing religious restrictions on **public office**.

Within two years, Syria should bring a comprehensive equality and anti-discrimination law into force, with accessible remedies.

We further recommend that, within twelve months, Syria adopt a plan to implement Decree No. 13 of 2026, developed with affected Kurdish communities and linked to **truth**, accountability, reparation and guarantees of **non-recurrence**.

Third, Displacement and property rights

Syria supported Ireland's recommendation to protect property rights by replacing **lost documents** and recognising alternative evidence of ownership.[6]

By 10 January 2026, UN agencies reported approximately 148,000 people displaced from Aleppo's Kurdish neighbourhoods.[7]

Alawite families also **faced** displacement and property seizure in rural Hama and al-Sumaria in Damascus, where STJ reported that forced **evictions** beginning in August 2025 displaced approximately 80% of the neighbourhood's residents.[8]

We urge States to recommend an independent housing, land and property **restitution mechanism** within two years, with judicial review and authority to order **restitution** or adequate compensation. Syria must end occupation and **extortion** by armed actors, protect **claimants** and ensure safe, voluntary and dignified return.

All victims, communities and groups must have equal access to truth, justice and reparation. Our written materials also set out recommendations on detention, missing women and girls, incitement and institutional reform.

Thank you very much.

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[5] Syrians for Truth and Justice. Syria/Nowruz 2026: Attacks on Kurds, Humiliation of Symbols, and Security Failure to Protect Civilians. 27 April 2026.

[6] UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/50/6 (2022), recommendation 133.100 (Ireland). See also Addendum, A/HRC/50/6/Add.1, recording Syria's support for this recommendation.

[7] UNDP, Flash Update: Restoration of Basic Services and Job Creation through Cash-for-Work in Conflict-hit Areas of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafieh in Aleppo City, January 2026.

[8] Syrians for Truth and Justice. Forced Evictions in the al-Sumaria Neighborhood of Damascus: Disregard for Property Deeds and Violations Against Alawite Families. 19 February 2026.

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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.