

## Foundation for the Development of Western Syria

August 29, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Re: Urgent Protection of Alawite and Other Minority Communities in Syria

Dear Secretary Rubio:

On behalf of the Foundation for the Development of Western Syria (the “Foundation”)<sup>1</sup>, I write to raise grave concerns about the escalating campaign of persecution, forced displacement, and violence targeting the Alawite community in Syria. The Foundation is a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting stabilization, reconstruction, and inclusive governance across western Syria and throughout the country, with a particular focus on protecting vulnerable communities and fostering interethnic and interfaith cooperation.

In recent days, credible reports from international and regional media have documented a disturbing pattern of state-directed ethnic cleansing. In the al-Sumaria neighborhood of Damascus, traditionally a residential area with an Alawite majority, families have been forcibly marked for eviction, with homes identified by large painted “X” symbols and residents given only seventy-two hours to vacate.<sup>2</sup> Reports further indicate that regime security forces aligned with President Ahmed al-Sharaa have arrested dozens of Alawites—including elderly and children—while subjecting them to physical abuse and compelling them to sign documents waiving their property rights without compensation or provisions for alternative housing.<sup>3</sup> Looting of Alawite homes, including theft of valuables and cash, has also been reported.<sup>4</sup> Along with these unlawful evictions, widespread physical assaults, property destruction, and sectarian threats were perpetrated, targeting primarily the Alawite community. The local authorities, instead of intervening to safeguard civilian rights, have maintained a policy of silence, exacerbating the crisis and prompting the need for immediate international intervention to protect women and the Alawite population from further harm.

These targeted actions follow the earlier mass killings and atrocities committed against

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<sup>1</sup> Disseminated by Tiger Hill Partners, a registered foreign agent, on behalf of the Foundation for the Development of Western Syria through Joseph E. Schmitz PLLC. More information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

<sup>2</sup> Alawite homes marked with Xs for forced evacuation from Damascus, Israel Hayom (Aug. 29, 2025), <https://www.israelhayom.com/2025/08/29/alawite-homes-marked-with-xs-forced-evacuation-from-damascus>.

<sup>3</sup> Susannah George, Syria’s minorities face rising repression under Sharaa regime, Wash. Post (Aug. 23, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/08/23/syria-minorities-druze-alawites-kurds-sharaa>.

<sup>4</sup> Id.; see also Alawite homes marked with Xs for forced evacuation, *supra* note 1.

Alawites in coastal Syria this spring, which resulted in more than one thousand civilian deaths.<sup>5</sup> Together, these events illustrate a deliberate and systematic campaign of persecution directed at Alawites and other minorities, consistent with patterns of ethnic cleansing. The Syrian government and its affiliated militias appear determined to consolidate control through intimidation, dispossession, and violence against communities historically tied to pluralism in Syria.

The Foundation respectfully urges the United States to take immediate steps to protect minority communities in Syria. This includes pressing for urgent international monitoring and accountability mechanisms, mobilizing humanitarian support to communities under threat, and coordinating with U.S. allies to deter further atrocities. Above all, U.S. leadership is critical to ensuring that Alawites, Druze, Kurds, Christians, and other vulnerable groups are not abandoned to the unchecked violence of militias and regime-aligned forces.

Given the severity of these developments, the Foundation respectfully requests a meeting with you and your senior staff to discuss measures the United States can take to safeguard minorities in Syria and to promote a sustainable framework for stabilization and inclusive governance.

We are deeply grateful for your leadership and for the continued commitment of the United States to protecting vulnerable communities worldwide.

Respectfully,

Mohamed Shabaan  
CEO, Foundation for the Development of Western Syria

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<sup>5</sup> Syrian committee reports 1,426 killed in March violence, says commanders did not order it, Reuters (July 22, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/syrian-committee-reports-1426-killed-march-violence-says-commanders-did-not-2025-07-22>.

NEWSLETTER



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# Alawite homes marked with X's; forced evacuation from Damascus

Residents were reportedly forced to sign documents waiving their property rights. Incidents of looting gold jewelry and stealing cash from homes were also reported.

by Shachar Kleiman — Published on 08-29-2025 09:00 — Last modified: 08-29-2025 12:23



Red Crescent workers carry a wounded man outside the Russian air base in Hmeimim, near Latakia in Syria's coastal region on March 11, 2025, as they evacuate wounded members of the Alawite sect who have sought refuge there following recent violence and revenge killings | Photo: AP/Omar Albam

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In Syria, photos were published overnight of Alawite homes marked with X symbols in the al-Sumariya neighborhood of Damascus. According to reports, the X mark is intended to instruct the home's residents to evacuate. According to Syrian journalists, dozens of families are being forced to leave the residential area.

The neighborhood is located near Al-Mezzeh Airport in the southwest of the capital. Earlier, eviction orders were published and signed by the "Public Housing Committee." The orders state: "We inform all those residing in unofficial housing in the al-Sumariya neighborhood to evacuate all homes within a maximum period of 72 hours."

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Alawite homes marked with X symbols in the al-Sumariya neighborhood of Damascus

Additionally, videos were published yesterday showing security personnel from al-Sharaa's regime attacking Alawites from the same neighborhood whom they had arrested. Subsequently, women from the neighborhood demonstrated against the arrests and were also attacked by regime personnel.

Residents were reportedly forced to sign documents waiving their property rights. Incidents of looting gold jewelry and stealing cash from homes were also reported.





Rescue teams evacuate the victims from amid the rubble following a blast that rocked Idlib in what Syria's Observatory for Human Rights said was "a base for non-Syrian fighters containing a weapons depot" in the northwestern Syrian province on August 14, 2025 (Photo: Sana/ AFP)

Following the events, the Alawite Religious Council in Syria published a condemnation statement: "We reject the crimes and violations of the de facto regime, led by interim president Ahmed al-Sharaa in the al-Sumariya area of Damascus. This regime invaded homes and forcibly evacuated residents simply because they belonged to the Alawite sect," it stated. The statement further noted that authorities "ignored legal documents proving home ownership," brutally attacked, publicly humiliated, and hurled sectarian insults at residents, including assaulting women.

Tags: Alawites Damascus Syria

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## Syrian committee reports 1,426 killed in March violence, says commanders did not order it

By Reuters

July 22, 2025 10:14 PM GMT+1 · Updated July 22, 2025



BEIRUT, July 22 (Reuters) - A Syrian government fact-finding committee said on Tuesday that 1,426 people had died in March in attacks on security forces and subsequent mass killings of Alawites, but concluded that commanders had not given orders for the revenge attacks.

The incidents in the coastal region were the worst violence to hit Syria since the downfall of President Bashar al-Assad last year. The fact-finding committee's work is seen as an important test of the new leadership, made up mainly of former anti-Assad rebel fighters, who are facing new unrest this month involving other minority groups in the southwest.

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The committee concluded that Syrian commanders did not give orders to commit violations and, in fact, gave orders to halt them.

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<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/syrian-committee-reports-1426-killed-march-violence-says-commanders-did-not-2025-07-22/>

The Supreme Alawite Council condemned the committee's findings, describing it in a statement on Tuesday as an "impudent play."

It said it rejects the findings of the committee, blaming the deadly attacks in March on the "de facto authority" represented by Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa and his government.

They called for an international and independent investigation under the direct supervision of the United Nations.

A [Reuters investigation](#) last month identified 1,479 Syrian Alawites killed and dozens who were missing from 40 distinct sites of revenge killings, and found a chain of command leading from the attackers directly to men who serve alongside Syria's new leaders in Damascus.

Syria's new leadership, which has roots in the insurgency led by Sunni Muslim Islamist groups against Assad, a member of the Alawite minority sect, has long sought to reassure minorities they will be safe.



[1/4] Alawite Syrians, who fled the violence in western Syria, walk in Nahr El Kabir River, after the reported mass killings of Alawite minority members, in Akkar, Lebanon March 11, 2025. REUTERS/Mohamed... [Purchase Licensing Rights](#) [Read more](#)

Safety of minorities has become a major issue again this month with hundreds of people killed in clashes between government security forces, Sunni Bedouin fighters, and militants from the Druze sect in the southern province of Sweida. The authorities have set up a new fact-finding committee in response.

**'WIDESPREAD BUT NOT ORGANISED'**

The violence began on March 6 with attacks on Syrian security forces stationed in the region. It put hospitals and other state institutions out of operation and caused large areas to fall out of government control, Farhan said.

The committee found that 238 members of the security forces were killed in these attacks, perpetrated by forces aligned with the former Assad government, Farhan said.

In response, around 200,000 armed men mobilized from across Syria, pouring into the coastal region, he said.

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"In terms of the fact-finding committee, acknowledging that atrocities against Alawite civilians happened is an important step towards justice," she told Reuters.

"[But] without the proper prosecution of perpetrators, then we have impunity. It won't be the justice and accountability that the victims deserve."

Reporting by Khalil Ashawi in Damascus and Maya Gebeily, Timour Azhari and Laila Bassam in Beirut; Writing by Tala Ramadan Editing by Andrew Heavens, Peter Graff, Rod Nickel

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*Democracy Dies in Darkness*

## Could Syria unravel? Fearful minorities resist new leader's bid for control.

Staggering violence in various regions is fueling minority demands for autonomy, posing a challenge to President Sharaa's plans for a strong centralized state.

August 23, 2025

By Kareem Fahim and Zakaria Zakaria

ARNAH, Syria — A wall of fear is rising around this scenic town in the foothills of Mount Hermon.

Arnah's many Druze residents say they are wary of straying beyond its borders because of violence or discrimination targeting their religious minority in parts of Syria. The townspeople are just as reluctant to let some outsiders in: The closest government troops remain at a checkpoint in the next town.

In Arnah and other areas home to religious and ethnic minorities, Syria's Sunni Islamist-led government is increasingly seen as a threat. The alienation represents a perilous turn for the country's leaders, who took power late last year after ousting the dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad and pledged to unify the country.

Instead, Syria is showing cracks.

In the mountainous Druze redoubts in Syria's south and west, along the Mediterranean coast where the Alawite religious minority is concentrated and in the Kurdish regions of the northeast, there have been calls for autonomy, decentralization or simply to be left alone. Residents who say they still cherish their Syrian identity fret about their future in the country. Some community leaders are seizing on current fears to press loudly for longtime dreams of independence.

For months after Assad's dramatic fall, "there was a lot of hope in the new Syria," said Nabih Kaboul, a Druze resident of Arnah. "Unfortunately, this period is worse than the one we were in."

The disaffection poses a dire challenge to President Ahmed al-Sharaa's drive to consolidate his young government's authority and his plans for national recovery after the long civil war.

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Sharaa has advocated for a centralized state led by Damascus, similar in structure to the one before Syria was fractured by its long civil war. His vision, which he says focuses on “development and construction and the unity of Syrian lands,” remains popular with many Syrians. It has also been embraced by influential foreign supporters, including Persian Gulf allies that have pledged Sharaa aid and support.

During Syria’s transition from the Assad years, the government wants “a strong centralized structure that would allow them to make decisions quickly,” said Haid Haid, a fellow in the Middle East and North Africa program at Chatham House. But recent episodes of staggering violence are threatening — even overtaking — such plans. Every week, “things are becoming more alarming rather than better,” Haid said.

The government has frequently blamed Syria’s troubles on remnants of the deposed Assad regime or foreign powers — particularly Israel, because of its military interventions in the country and outreach to the Druze. Such accusations are fueling a political polarization that has left some minorities and government forces viewing each other with mounting mistrust.

“The fear is from both sides,” said Diaa Kheirbeik, a mayor in Jableh, on Syria’s coast, who is trying to calm tensions between government forces stationed there and Alawite residents who are still reeling from a massacre of their relatives and neighbors in March by government forces or fighters aligned with them.

Syria was shaken by another wave of killings last month, in Sweida, a Druze-majority city south of the capital, Damascus. More than 1,000 people died in unrest that was marked by atrocities, including some carried out against Druze civilians by fighters aligned with the state.

Weeks later, Sweida remains restive and isolated, its entrances sealed by government forces while its residents struggle for food and water and hold occasional demonstrations. During the latest protests on Aug. 16, residents provocatively demanded self-determination and protection from Israel, which carried out airstrikes against Syrian troops during the fighting in the city.

The Trump administration’s Syria envoy, Thomas Barrack, who has been a strong backer of Sharaa and his efforts to unite the country, acknowledged after the bloodshed in Sweida that Syria might need to consider alternatives to a highly centralized state.

“Not a federation but something short of that, in which you allow everybody to keep their own integrity, their own culture, their own language, and no threat of Islamism,” he told a group of reporters last month. “I think everyone is saying we need to figure out a way to be more reasonable,” he said.

## **A pledge to protect minorities**

Sharaa has dismissed the possibility of Syria's partition. "There are desires among some people to divide Syria and try to create local cantons internally, but logically, politically and rationally, this is impossible," he said in a speech carried by state media Sunday.

He condemned Israel's interventions in Sweida, saying they were "aimed at weakening the state." But he also acknowledged his own government's role in alienating the city, saying that perpetrators of abuses during the fighting would be punished.

Since taking power in December after leading the rebel charge that toppled Assad, Sharaa has struggled to convince skeptics that his vows to protect minorities are sincere. His own history — as a former militant who led al-Qaeda's Syrian branch — has been a liability. So has the conduct of extremist fighters nominally under his command and linked to a growing catalogue of atrocities.

Efforts by Sharaa's government to attract foreign investment, ease Syria's diplomatic isolation and rid itself of international sanctions imposed on Assad have been more successful.

"While that might help," Syria's most intractable problems are political, Haid said. The government's zeal to assert control over the entirety of Syria — including through force of arms — was "not working," he said. Instead, he advocated a national dialogue among the country's different communities. "Only time, major engagement and effort build that trust and understanding," he said, but given the government's current approach, "things will most likely continue to get worse."

Syria's most destabilizing rift may be the dispute between the government and the Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish-led militia that gained control of a large swath of territory in northeast Syria in recent years during the fight against the Islamic State militant group.

The SDF, which is supported by the United States, struck an agreement with the Syrian government in March that in part stipulated "the integration of all civil and military institutions" into the Syrian state.

The deal has yet to be implemented, though, amid disagreements over how much autonomy the region now controlled by the SDF will have. Further complicating the situation is continuing violence between the SDF and militias backed by Turkey. Ankara views the SDF as an adversary because of its links to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which fought a long insurgency against the Turkish state.

An SDF-sponsored conference of minority communities in the eastern city of Hasakah this month drew the Syrian government's ire by calling, among other things, for a decentralized state. The gathering did not "represent the Syrian people," Syria's foreign minister said a few days later, accusing the participants of trying to "exploit the events in Sweida."

## Killings along the coast

Anti-government sentiment also pools in the villages, towns and cities of Syria's coastal region. This is the heartland of Syria's Alawite religious minority, a historically marginalized community that has faced resentment because of its association with Assad, an Alawite, who drew heavily on the sect to fill senior government and military posts.

The coastal killings in March, triggered by attacks by Assad loyalists on government security forces, claimed at least 1,400 lives and further fueled Alawite disaffection. More than 200 government soldiers were killed in the violence. But much of the slaughter targeted civilians on the basis of their sect, the victims gunned down after being asked if they were Alawites, by government forces or fighters aligned with them, according to residents and a United Nations report on the violence.

The coast's shaken residents say they are now filled with doubts as to whether the government will bring the perpetrators to justice and, more fundamentally, whether their region will be welcomed as part of Syria and not seen as a disloyal appendage, pining for a fallen regime.

Kheirbeik, the mayor of Hay al-Rumeili in the Jableh district, said more than 55 people in his area had been killed during the unrest. Shops he owned below his apartment, including a barbershop, were burned and destroyed. Still, Kheirbeik has persevered as an interlocutor between the government security forces — which continue to maintain a heavy presence in Alawite areas — and local residents.

His work is far from easy. People in the neighborhood, still scared to go out after nightfall, had tarred him as a traitor, he said. The government had ignored his pleas to post locals at security checkpoints, preferring they be staffed by soldiers from Idlib, the Syrian province that Sharaa had ruled before he came to Damascus.

A division of Syria “will not solve our problems,” Kheirbeik said. “We need the wheat of Hasakah,” he added, referring to the province in Syria's east, on the Iraqi border. “They need the fish of the coast.”

“We need each other.”

## Deeply held grievances

In Arnah, Druze residents continue to emphasize the community's historic connections to Syria and the importance of the Druze in the country's social fabric.

“We are all Syrian. We are all here together,” said Reem Abu Qais, a student.

She called accusations that Druze are trying to divide the country “misinformation.” Other local residents grew defensive when discussing the role of Israel, which portrays itself as the protector of Syrian Druze.

A day before Washington Post journalists visited Arnah, an Israeli military spokesman posted video of himself at a small Assad-era military outpost on the outskirts of town containing some emptied huts and a few destroyed trucks. Israel's mission there was "defensive," the spokesman wrote. The Israeli incursions into Syrian territory and Israel's demand that Syria demilitarize a swath of the country south of Damascus have angered the government and stoked popular anger, some of it directed toward the Druze.

"They call us traitors," one resident said. "The Israelis do not ask our permission before they come here," another added.

They remained deeply suspicious of Sharaa's government, holding it responsible for the violence in Sweida, which began with clashes between local Druze and Bedouin fighters in the city. Among those implicated in the orgy of executions, mutilations and house burnings were government troops, as well as tribal fighters who joined them in support.

But the grievances in Arnah go beyond Sweida. Residents say they have been harassed at checkpoints as they tried to leave town. They complain that fellow Druze had faced discrimination at state institutions, like universities and hospitals.

"We are anxious," said Hussein Massoud, another resident, "and worried about the future."

*Mohamad El Chamaa in Beirut contributed to this report.*

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## What readers are saying

The comments reflect skepticism about the viability of Syria as a unified nation-state, given its diverse ethnic and religious makeup and historical divisions. Some commenters suggest that external influences, particularly from Israel, exacerbate internal conflicts, while others... [Show more](#)

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