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## **Dozens killed in fresh wave of sectarian violence**

**[CSW](#) (02.05.2025) - CSW is concerned by news of a fresh wave of sectarian violence in Syria, which broke out on 28 April after a voice clip circulated on social media purporting to be a Druze cleric insulting the prophet of Islam, and which continued until 30 April.**

The clip sparked widespread anger among Syria's Sunni population, although the Interior Ministry issued a statement saying that its initial investigation showed that that the cleric was not the person speaking in the clip.

CSW's sources on the ground confirmed that dozens were killed over the past few days when armed groups affiliated with the government attacked the towns of Ashrafeih Sahnaya and Jaramana on the outskirts of Damascus. The majority of inhabitants in both towns belong to the Druze and Christian minorities.

Local Druze militias reportedly attempted to defend the towns, but were outnumbered by Sunni militiamen loyal to the government. On 30 April Israel, which has a significant Druze minority, conducted a series of airstrikes on the Sunni militias advancing towards Ashrafeih Sahnaya. On 2 May Israel also launched [airstrikes](#) on unidentified targets near Syria's presidential palace.

Negotiations between government officials and Druze community leaders are currently underway to contain and de-escalate the situation.

CSW's Founder President Mervyn Thomas said: ***'CSW condemns this new outbreak of sectarian violence, and we extend our sincerest condolences to the families and loved ones of the victims. We call on the Syrian authorities to act swiftly to de-escalate tensions and to crack down on sectarian incitement and hate speech, including by tracing and holding instigators and perpetrators accountable. The***

***Syrian government should work collaboratively with civil society organisations to promote peace and mutual respect between every sector of the Syrian society. We also call on Israel to refrain from taking unilateral actions that could aggravate sectarian tension between the different communities in Syria.'***

**Note to Editors:**

1. The Syrian Druze are believed to constitute around 3.2 percent of the population. Originating from the Near East, the Druze self-identify as 'Unitarians' or 'the People of Monotheism,' and are deemed by hard-line Islamists to be heretics.

**More reading**

[Syrian Druze spiritual leader slams government over deadly sectarian clashes](#)

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## **Three women of a religious minority shot and killed in Homs**

[CSW](#) (23.04.2024) - **Three women belonging to the Al-Murshidi, or Al-Murshidiyyah, religious minority community were killed in the Karm Al-Louz neighbourhood of Homs, Syria, in an attack by two men wearing balaclavas and riding a motorcycle.**

CSW sources in Homs report that Manal Hassan and her 19-year-old daughter Lynn Haydar were shot dead on 18 April. Ms Hasan's other daughter, Luna, also 19, was severely wounded and taken to hospital, where she succumbed to her injuries on 22 April. Eyewitnesses said the victims were shot while crossing a road.

The Al-Murshidiyyah is a Syrian religious community which emerged in the 1940s as an offshoot of the Alawi/Nusayri sect. There are no official statistics about the number of adherents, but several reports estimate it comprises approximately 300,000 persons living primarily in the Western Syrian Provinces of Homs, Latakia and Tarsus, and in some suburbs of Damascus.

CSW sources also reported that religiously-motivated abuses, including insults, bullying, intimidation, and the throwing of sound bombs and powerful fireworks at Alawite gatherings and school playgrounds, have become more frequent in recent weeks.

CSW's Founder President Mervyn Thomas said: '***CSW extends our sincere condolences to the families and loved ones of Manal Hassan, Lynn Haydar and Luna Haydar. We urge President Al-Sharaa and the interim government to deal swiftly and decisively with sectarian incitement and to ensure that all Syrian citizens receive protection from sectarian violence and equal treatment under***

***the law. The Syrian government must be encouraged to speed up the transitional justice process and launch a national dialogue to address sectarianism and divisions between different community groups without further delay. We also call upon the international community to assist the Syrian people by providing humanitarian aid and sanctions relief at this critical time of transition.'***

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## **Violence targeting Alawite and Christian civilians in the coastal region of Syria**

By Maria Lozano.

ACN (10.03.2025) - *Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) expresses its deep concern over the escalating violence in Syria, particularly in the coastal region, where hundreds of civilians have fallen victim to indiscriminate attacks. The situation has created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, also for Christian communities, who have already suffered greatly over the past decade.*

According to sources in Latakia close to the charity, who ACN prefers to keep anonymous for security reasons, last Friday was described as “a very black and painful day” in the cities of Tartus, Baniyas, Jabla, and Latakia, and the surrounding villages. The source reported: “Massacres against many Alawites, often indiscriminately, in response to an ambush by some Alawite militants that killed about 20 members of the new security forces.”

The same source stated: “The number of victims is very sad; the majority were civilians, more than 600, who lost their lives, including young people, women, university doctors, and pharmacists. Some families with their children were killed in cold blood.” **Among the deceased were also members of Christian communities, such as “a father and son from an Evangelical church in Latakia, who were stopped in their car and killed, as well as the father of a priest in Baniyas.”**

Furthermore, reports indicate that homes and vehicles were looted, affecting all but also Christians, forcing some families to take refuge in the homes of Sunni friends. In the Christian village of Belma, “where there are no weapons and most of the residents are elderly, the population endured two days of terror, with the sanctity of homes violated and property stolen.”

Meanwhile, the Apostolic Vicariate of the Latin Community in Syria has issued a statement expressing its deep concern over these attacks on innocent civilians. In the document, signed by **Bishop Hanna** and dated March 9, 2025, it states:

“We join the voice of every honest and patriotic person in this country, emphasizing our rejection of all forms of violence, revenge, and retaliation based on sectarian and

religious grounds. We appeal to the country's authorities to quickly put an end to these attacks, which are inconsistent with all human, moral and religious values."

The statement also mentions President Ahmed Al-Sharaa's promise to hold accountable those who attack civilians and to implement "the necessary transitions to lead the country toward security." Furthermore, it reiterates the commitment to Syria's territorial unity and rejects any attempt to divide the country.

In his Sunday of Orthodoxy homily, delivered on March 9, 2025, at the Mariamite Cathedral in Damascus, **Patriarch John X** also addressed the violence in the coastal region and issued an urgent appeal to President Al-Sharaa:

"The tragic events unfolding in Syria's coastal region have claimed the lives of many civilians and public security personnel, leaving numerous others wounded. However, the majority of the victims were not affiliated with any militant factions; rather, they were innocent, unarmed civilians, including women and children. The sanctities and dignities of the people have been violated, and the slogans and chants being used are spreading division, fuelling sectarianism, and undermining civil peace."

He referenced the looting and violence in Baniyas, in the Al-Qusour neighbourhood, where "residents were forced to leave their homes only to be executed, and then their belongings were stolen."

He also denounced the **desecration of religious symbols**, declaring: "The icon of the Virgin Mary has been smashed, trampled upon, and desecrated. She is the Virgin Mary, whom all Muslims honour alongside us, and whom the Holy Qur'an dedicated an entire chapter to – Surah Maryam – affirming that God chose her and made her the most honoured among all women of the world."

Addressing President Al-Sharaa, the Patriarch urged the restoration of security and stability for all Syrians without distinction, reaffirming his rejection of sectarianism and calling for national unity and peaceful coexistence.

Beyond this crisis, the Christian community, together with the rest of the population in Syria, faces growing uncertainty following the takeover of power by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which has further intensified their vulnerability in various regions of the country.

READ MORE

[Sectarian massacres: Patriarchs of the Churches call for an end to the logic of revenge](#)  
(Agenzia Fides)

[Fear among Christians after deadly attacks](#) (Al-Monitor)

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## **Fightings in a predominantly Alawite region: a priest in Aleppo testifies**

### ***Clashes between interim govt security forces and Alawite Bashar al-Assad loyalists: over 1000 people killed, most of them civilians***

By Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (10.03.2025) - Almost 750 civilians were killed, mostly in close-range shootings in fightings opposing security forces of the interim government and Bashar al-Assad loyalists in the last few days.

In addition, 125 government security forces and close to 150 militants with armed groups affiliated with al-Assad were also killed.

Local residents have described scenes of looting and mass killings, including of children.

In Hai Al Kusour, a predominantly Alawite neighbourhood in the coastal city of Baniyas, residents say the streets are filled with scattered bodies, piled up and covered in blood. Men of different ages were shot dead there, witnesses said.

Residents of Baniyas, one of the towns worst hit by the violence, said bodies were strewn on the streets or left unburied in homes and on the roofs of buildings, and nobody was able to collect them.

Ali Sheha, a resident of Baniyas who fled with his family and neighbors hours after the violence broke out Friday, said at least 20 of his neighbors and colleagues in one Alawite neighborhood of the city were killed, some of them in their shops, or in their homes.

Hundreds of people have reportedly fled their homes in the coastal provinces of Latakia and Tartus - strongholds of Assad support.

Electricity and drinking water were cut off in large areas around the western coastal city of Latakia.

The Alawite sect is an offshoot of Shia Islam and makes up around 10% of Syria's population, which is majority Sunni Muslim. Assad belongs to the sect.

### ***Who are the Alawites?***

Alawites are an Arab ethnoreligious group living primarily in Syria (between 2 and 3 million) but also in Turkey (mainly Hatay Province) and northern Lebanon.

It is a sect of Islam that splintered from early Shia in the 9th century. The Quran is only one of their holy books. Their interpretation has very little in common with the Shia Muslim interpretation. The sect does not prohibit the consumption of alcohol for its adherents. Alawite theology is based on the belief in reincarnation.

### ***The testimony and the analysis of a Catholic priest***

"I'm writing to you after almost a month to let you know what we're experiencing in Syria at the moment. In fact, since 6th March the situation has seriously worsened, and today the atmosphere in the country is again one of desperation.

In the last few days, tension has increased in various areas, both in the south in the city of Suwaida, and in Jaramana, a suburb of Damascus, both with a Druze majority, but

also in the coastal cities with an Alawite majority, especially in Jable. Several acts of violence have been recorded, until two days ago when an armed 'resistance' broke out against the official forces, rejected by a large part of the population, for alleged acts of violence and revenge against civilians from the minorities.

On the other hand, there is talk of a real military action organised by supporters of the old regime, supported by regional forces that would have an interest in creating and maintaining a state of chaos in Syria: On the one hand, Israel is advancing into Syrian territory and taking it over, trying to present itself as the defender of the Druze against government forces, considered 'terrorist militias'; on the other hand, Iran seems unwilling to accept the loss of the power it had in Syria at the time of Assad; without forgetting the role of Russia, which remains ambiguous.

Once again the Syrians are on the brink of a civil war, so we are really worried. Some voices accuse the international community of not fully assuming its responsibilities towards the Middle East in general and Syria in particular, which remains a land where the great powers clash, each one trying to secure a slice of the pie.

Other rumours accuse the new Al-Sharaa government that, despite its fine promises, has so far not taken serious action to guarantee public and fair trials for war criminals, a fact that has given free reign to those who want to take justice into their own hands and allowed those who want to organise themselves to 'liberate' Syria again to act undisturbed!

Another fault of the new president is that he is maintaining the status quo of his government, formed immediately after the fall of the old regime and which remains in office beyond the fixed term of three months. This government brings together people with little experience in politics, all belonging to the former Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), and with a strongly religious political ideology.

Despite countless rumours, both from abroad and within the country, that a government representing all components of Syrian society is essential to maintain stability in Syria, no concrete actions have been taken in this direction so far.

They wanted to please the observers with a half day of 'national dialogue', in which the fate of the country should have been decided, a conference that drew up a final document that remains for now ink on paper.

Everyone was waiting for 1st March, the date on which a new transitional government should have been formed, a missed objective that has left many disappointed, while the Syrian people are waiting for a clear word from their authorities, a word that explains what they have in mind. Unfortunately, the rulers continue to treat the people as a 'flock' and not as a true partner. This silence, barely endured, is broken only by the weapons that threaten to destroy what remains of our hope.

Here the people are tired and we wouldn't know what to say or how to instil courage to face what is to come... So I ask you to pray for us, we need it so much, let us raise our prayers to the good Lord who knows how to work miracles."

\* *Father Karakach, Priest of the church of St Francis of Assisi in Aleppo* ([Anglican.ink](http://Anglican.ink))

## **READ MORE**

[Joint Statement by the Patriarchs in Syria](#)

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## Report highlights Assyrian fight for their future in their homelands



[AINA](#) (28.02.2025) -- Assyrian leaders and advocates are sounding the alarm on escalating human rights violations in Iraq and Syria, where forced displacement, systemic discrimination, and cultural erasure continue unabated. As political disenfranchisement and targeted violence drive Assyrians from their ancestral lands, the urgent need for intervention grows stronger.

A new [report](#) exposes the policies eroding Assyrian rights, including land seizures, religious persecution, and the suppression of political representation. This comes on the heels of a pivotal gathering of an Assyrian coalition in Washington, DC, where the Athra Alliance and advocates presented their case at the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit. They engaged with distinguished officials and leading policy think tanks to discuss their concrete action plan for addressing the worsening crisis.

Assyrians in Iraq have faced deliberate political marginalization. Kurdish and Iranian-backed proxies continue to manipulate Assyrian political seats, effectively silencing the community and obstructing self-determination. Alongside this, land confiscation and illegal appropriations systematically strip Assyrians of their homes, continuing to force many into permanent exile.

Security threats remain dire. Political assassinations of Assyrian leaders in Kurdish-controlled regions remain unsolved, with perpetrators enjoying impunity. Economic suppression further fuels this crisis. Assyrians endure discriminatory policies and restricted access to resources, leaving them economically incapacitated. In education, the Kurdish-led administration in Iraq imposes a mandatory curriculum that expropriates Assyrian history and glorifies figures responsible for the assassination of Patriarch Shimmun XXI and the massacres of their ancestors.

The report also exposes extremist threats, including Hawpa, a Kurdish neo-Nazi organization, which is registered with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). Its charter "explicitly calls for the genocide of Assyrians, outlining plans for extermination before later being removed from their website in an effort to obscure its extremist agenda."

In Syria, Assyrian schools have been forcibly shut down, further erasing Assyrian cultural and linguistic heritage. Assyrians are trapped between two oppressive education systems: the central Syrian curriculum, which includes Sharia law and is banned by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), and the Kurdish-imposed AANES curriculum, which promotes historical revisionism, glorifies terrorism, lacks accreditation, and advances Kurdish nationalist ideology.

Fear of retaliation forces individuals who report these violations into anonymity, highlighting the repression and violent retaliation against Assyrians in the region. Assyrians who speak out against the human rights abuses committed by the Kurdish administration face targeted violence, harassment, disappearance and death.

Western-backed Syrian Democratic Forces have repeatedly desecrated Assyrian churches and cemeteries by digging trenches and establishing military positions within these sacred sites, turning them into battlegrounds and launch points for attacks, placing Assyrian civilians in the crossfire of a conflict they did not choose. The report documents violations that meet the established criteria for ethnic cleansing, demonstrating a systematic campaign to erase Assyrians from their indigenous homeland.

As Assyrians face ongoing challenges in both Iraq and Syria, securing self-administration remains essential for their survival. In Iraq, one of the last remaining hopes lies in the establishment of the Nineveh Governorate as an autonomous region, governed by Assyrians and protected by a locally-embedded security force. Similarly, in Northeast Syria, self-administration remains crucial for Assyrians to sustain their presence in their ancestral lands and ensure their continued survival.

The report concludes with a decisive call to action, urging policymakers and human rights organizations to enforce protections against land seizures, support Assyrian self-governance, and hold accountable those responsible for political repression and violence. Without immediate intervention, the indigenous Assyrians of Iraq and Syria risk being erased from their homelands.

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## **Francophone Catholic schools, the ignored soft power of Europe**

Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers



HRWF (05.03.2025) - On 6-7 of February , Cairo was hosting the 5th Colloquium of Francophone Schools in the Middle East, organized by Catholic charity *L'Œuvre d'Orient*.

The meeting saw 350 Catholic education professionals come together to exchange views on their mission amid regional challenges. Guests included His Beatitude Ibrahim Isaac Sidrak, Patriarch of the Coptic Catholic Church, and Franco-Egyptian journalist Robert Solé.

Francophone schools in the Middle East provide quality education to over 400,000 students, promoting the French language and humanistic values while ensuring educational stability and professional prospects for young people in the face of regional crises. This is a soft power that should be increasingly empowered by EU countries.

### ***Syria: An Educational and Social Centre for the Poor in Aleppo***

In 7 years of war, nearly 300,000 people have died, millions have been displaced and a third of the population have been forced into exile.

Many universities have had to close. At the same time, the exile of qualified professionals and academics has considerably lowered the general standard of education. Young women are the first to be marginalised from the educational system

**To cope with this situation, the Feshet Sama Centre ("Heavenly Space" in Arabic) has set up an educational monitoring system for children and adults, regardless of their religious or social backgrounds, who do not have the means to continue their schooling.**

The centre is continually developing and now has 400 students — 50 more than last year. 80% of the beneficiaries are girls or young women, most of whom come from areas that have been occupied by Daesh, Jabat al-Nosra, and various rebel groups. The association seeks to empower them and provide the means for their social inclusion.

Moreover, the centre offers collective programmes that help all communities to really live side by side in harmony: a peace education programme, psychological and social support for mothers and children, manual work, academic programmes, etc.

Many families, ruined by the war, cannot afford to pay for a year's study at the "Feshet Sama Centre." Their intention is however to train 50 additional students, an investment of €45,400 for the centre. Moreover, **the Feshet Sama Centre initiative could subsequently be replicated in other Syrian cities.**

Private initiatives like the one of the "Feshet Sama Centre" are sometimes more efficient soft power tools for the local population, for peace and for the image of Europe than any advocacy for EU funding that is disregarded by Brussels for various reasons.

For more information and to contribute, see [HERE](#).

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## **Syrian government proposes 'Islamic path' changes to education system**

***"There have been amendments that interfere with the Islamic ideology of society and education," Mar Boutros Qassis, the archbishop of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Aleppo, said.***

[The Jerusalem Post](#) (04.01.2025) - Syria's education ministry published a list of planned changes to Syria's school curriculum on Wednesday in a post on Facebook.

Ahmad al-Sharaa, also known as [Abu Mohammad al-Julani](#), is Syria's new de facto leader since Syria's former president Bashar al-Assad was deposed by Syrian rebels led by al-Julani's organization [Hayat Tahrir al-Sham](#), an offshoot of al Qaeda, in early December.

The changes include changing the phrases "path of goodness" to "Islamic path" and "those who are damned and have gone astray" to "Jews and Christians."

They redefine the word "martyr" from someone who died for a homeland to someone who sacrifices themselves "for the sake of God." The phrase "defending the nation" is set to be replaced with "defending Allah." The phrase "God's Sharia" was replaced with "Law of Justice," and the phrase "human brotherhood" was changed to "faith brotherhood."

They also proposed to remove any references to deposed president Bashar al-Assad and his family.

Additionally, there were several changes to references of the [Ottoman Empire](#). The phrase "Ottoman Administration" will replace "Ottoman Occupation," and references to the 1916 mass execution of Arab nationalists under the Ottomans were removed.

Another proposed amendment was to remove references to evolution from the science curriculum.

Education Minister Nazir al-Qadri said the curriculum is essentially unchanged and will remain the same until specialized committees are able to review and revise the proposed changes. "The curricula in all Syrian schools will remain as is until specialized committees are formed to review" them, he said, according to *The Wall Street Journal*.

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## **Assad's fall enables access to ruined 2,700-year-old Damascus synagogue**

***Only nine Jews remain in the Jewish community of the destroyed Eliyahu Hanavi synagogue in capital's Jobar neighborhood (Shortened text)***

By Bassem Mroue

AP (03.01.2025) - In this Damascus suburb, the handful of remaining Jews in Syria can again make pilgrimages to one of the world's oldest synagogues where people from throughout the region once came to pray.

Syria's 13-year civil war left the synagogue largely destroyed. Walls and roofs have collapsed. Some artifacts are missing. A marble sign in Arabic at the gate says it was first built 720 years before Christ.

Since insurgents overthrew president Bashar al-Assad in early December, people have been able to safely visit the widely destroyed Jobar suburb that was pounded for years by government forces while in the hands of opposition fighters.

Syria was once home to one of the world's largest Jewish communities. Those numbers have shrunk dramatically, especially after the State of Israel was created in 1948 and following anti-Jewish riots and persecution.

Today, only nine Jews live in Syria, according to the head of the community, almost all older men and women. The community believes that no Syrian Jews will remain in the country in a few years.

The Jewish community in Syria dates back to the prophet Elijah's Damascus sojourn nearly 3,000 years ago. After 1099, when Christian armies conquered Jerusalem in the First Crusade and massacred the city's Muslim and Jewish inhabitants, some 50,000 Jews reportedly fled to Damascus, making up nearly a third of residents. Another wave of Jews later arrived from Europe, fleeing the Spanish Inquisition that began in 1492.

The community in Syria numbered about 100,000 at the start of the 20th century. In the years surrounding Israel's creation, Syrian Jews faced increased tensions and restrictions. Many emigrated to Israel, the United States and other countries.

Under the Assad family's 54-year dynasty, Jews in Syria enjoyed freedom in performing religious duties, but community members were barred from traveling outside the country to prevent them from going to Israel until the early 1990s. Once travel restrictions were lifted after Arab-Israeli peace talks started, many more left.

Assad's forces recaptured Jobar from rebels in 2018 but imposed tight security, preventing many people from reaching the area.

The new rulers of Syria, led by the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, have said they will allow members of all religions to perform their religious duties freely.