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Syria: Government forces commit atrocities against Druzes in Suwayda

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Syrian security forces in Mazara'a in Suwayda province – July 14, 2025. @sayed_ridha, x.

Syrian government forces have once again launched an attack on religious minority populations – this time against the Druze, a religious group which makes up about 3% of Syria's population, and who are considered heretics by jihadist groups.

Between July 14 and July 18, Syria's Islamist-controlled government sent troops to occupy Suwayda province, a mountainous region of southern Syria where the majority of the population is Druze. Upon entering population centers in the province, government troops carried out numerous atrocities.

Videos circulating on social media show pro-government fighters forcing Druze men to jump off a balcony and then shooting them as they jump. It is reported that an evangelical pastor and his entire family were murdered.

Israel, which also has a [Druze population](https://www.aymennaltamimi.com/p/israel-and-the-syrian-druze-an-explainer) (<https://www.aymennaltamimi.com/p/israel-and-the-syrian-druze-an-explainer>) and has promised to protect Syria's Druzes, responded by [attacking](https://www.fabricebalanche.com/analyses/israel-pourra-t-il-sauver-le-djebel-druze/) (<https://www.fabricebalanche.com/analyses/israel-pourra-t-il-sauver-le-djebel-druze/>) government forces from the air, and bombing the Syrian capital of Damascus. By July 18, the Syrian government bowed to the pressure and withdrew its forces from Suwayda city. As of July 21, a tenuous ceasefire is holding.

It is [estimated](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwykzznepw0o) (<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwykzznepw0o>) that over 1,100 people, including government troops, civilians, and Druze militia fighters, were killed over the course of the week, and 128,000 displaced.

The attack is Syria's worst violence since March, when government forces organized the masacre (<https://www.csi-int.org/news/csi-event-at-un-highlights-looming-crisis-for-syrian-religious-minorities/>) of thousands of Alawite Muslim civilians in Syria's coastal regions. These massacres led CSI to issue a Genocide Warning (<https://www.csi-int.org/news/christian-solidarity-international-issues-genocide-warning-for-syria/>) for Syria on March 10.

How the violence unfolded

In December, a jihadist coalition led by Ahmed al-Sharaa, a former member of al Qaeda and the leader of the terrorist group HTS (Haya'at Tahrir al-Sham (<https://www.csi-int.org/news/who-are-hts-the-conquerors-of-aleppo/>)), overthrew the brutal dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad. Al-Sharaa declared himself president of Syria in January.

Since then, Suwayda province has been controlled by independent Druze militias, who supported the overthrow of Assad but have so far refused to lay down their arms and accept security forces from the new government in their towns.

At the end of April, a rumor that a Druze leader had insulted Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, led government-aligned forces to attack Druze towns (<https://www.csi-int.org/news/syrias-druze-minority-under-threat/>) near Damascus. Druze militias have also regularly clashed with government-backed militias from Muslim Bedouin tribes who live in the region.

On Sunday, July 13, some of these Bedouin militias abducted (<https://www.aymennaltamimi.com/p/the-recent-violence-in-al-suwayda>) a Druze man named Fadlallah Duwara on the road between Suwayda and Damascus. In retaliation, Druze militias attacked a Bedouin neighborhood (<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp90l77187zo>) in Suwayda city, leading to a spiral of violence between the Bedouins and Druzes. On July 14, President al-Sharaa announced that he would send troops to "restore order" in Suwayda.

Druze leaders, under pressure, initially accepted (<https://www.aymennaltamimi.com/p/the-recent-violence-in-al-suwayda>) the arrival of government troops. But as they entered Druze-majority towns, they began looting Druze homes and attacking Druze civilians. Government forces chanted (<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y76e9p1gno>) "Allahu Akbar" and called Druzes "infidels" and "pigs." Numerous videos on social media show government fighters forcing older Druze men to have their mustaches (a symbol of their faith) shaved off, and executing civilians in the street.

In response, the Druze militias (<https://www.aymennaltamimi.com/p/statements-of-druze-factions-on-the>) – including those that had previously supported working with the new government – joined forces and fought back. These militias attacked Bedouin civilians in turn, lead-

ing Druze and Bedouin civilians to flee (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/07/turk-calls-immediate-steps-ensure-protection-people-suweida-and-across-syria>) in both directions.

Some of the worst violence seems to have occurred in Suwayda city, the capital of the province, which largely escaped the violence of Syria's long civil war. There, a Druze woman told the BBC (<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y76e9p1gno>), "There were bodies everywhere outside our building. ...One of the worst feelings ever is to keep waiting for people to come into your house and decide whether we should live or die."

In a [communication](https://x.com/CSI_humanrights/status/1946202615236489265) (https://x.com/CSI_humanrights/status/1946202615236489265) received by CSI on Friday, July 18, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in Suwayda stated that the province was under a "siege," "lacking water, electricity, medicine or food." The Archdiocese appealed for the opening of "humanitarian crossings," and pledged "we will remain on this mountain until the end."

In the village of al-Mazara'a in Suwayda province, CSI has received information that a man named Bishar Qasim Arnous and his three sons – Barra' Bishar Arnous, Moaz Bishar Arnous, and Mi'dad Bishar Arnous – were executed by government forces. [Al-Mazara'a](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwykzznepw0o) (<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwykzznepw0o>) was controlled by Druze militias until last week, but has now been seized by government forces.

In another [incident](https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/07/turk-calls-immediate-steps-ensure-protection-people-suweida-and-across-syria) (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/07/turk-calls-immediate-steps-ensure-protection-people-suweida-and-across-syria>), according to the UN Human Rights Office, government troops opened fire on a family gathering, killing 13 people.

Pastor, family murdered

The Sweden-based aid organization A Demand for Action [reported](https://x.com/DemandForAction/status/1946914568267317416) (<https://x.com/DemandForAction/status/1946914568267317416>) that Khaled Mazhar, the pastor of the Good Shepherd Evangelical Church in Suwayda city, was murdered along with his wife, his children, and some of his other relatives – twelve people in all.

"A thirteenth victim – a young woman – miraculously survived, as the perpetrators believed she was dead," the group said.

Weak international response

International reaction to the killings has so far been muted. On Sunday, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio [demanded](https://x.com/marcorubio/status/1946736912854835380) (<https://x.com/marcorubio/status/1946736912854835380>) that the Syrian government "bring to justice anyone guilty of atrocities including those in their own ranks."