

Distr.: General
27 March 2026

Original: English

Human Rights Council
Sixty-first session

International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law violations committed during the July 2025 violence in Suwayda, Syria

Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

Summary

The present report examines serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in the context of and following the July 2025 escalation in Suwayda governorate. The report aims to clarify the factual developments and provide an independent and impartial record of the facts and circumstances that led to the escalation and the violations of applicable international law norms relevant to all conflict actors. The report briefly covers the events in Jaramana and Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya in Rural Damascus governorate in April and May 2025 and focuses on the events in Suwayda in July. It describes the tensions leading up to the events, including the localised conflict in the Suwayda city neighbourhood of Maqwas that prompted the governmental military operation, followed by three overlapping waves of violence involving multiple actors between 14 and 19 July that killed more than 1,700 people according to the Commission's conservative assessment, the large majority of whom were from the Druze community, but also includes Bedouins from Suwayda and government forces. Each wave was accompanied by severe violence against civilians and other violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, noting in particular the displacement of the civilian population. The entire period was also marked by elevated levels of hate speech and disinformation, which was disseminated largely through social media.

The first wave of violence involved governmental forces, including both Internal Security Forces and the Syrian Arab Army, and associated tribal fighters, mostly from Dar'a and Suwayda, entering the villages and then the city of Suwayda, committing violations against members of the Druze community including murders, direct and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, arbitrary arrests and abductions, torture and ill-treatment, pillage, attacks on civilian property, sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, and outrages upon personal dignity, and attacks on buildings dedicated to religion accompanied by discriminatory sectarian insults.

This was then followed by a second wave of violence directed at the Bedouin community, during which Druze armed groups including those under the Suwayda Military Council (later consolidated under the Suwayda National Guard), engaged in murder, direct and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary detention, outrages upon personal dignity, attacks on religious buildings as well as pillage – culminating in the

forced displacement of the entire Bedouin community from almost all of National Guard-held Suwayda.

The third wave involved the entry of several-thousands of tribal fighters from across the country following a call for tribal mobilization during which violations against the Druze community were carried out, including the systematic looting and burning of nearly every home in 35 predominantly Druze and mixed villages in the north and west of the governorate. Tribal fighters also engaged in murder, abductions and outrages upon personal dignity, as well as pillage.

Following the formal cessation of hostilities from 19 July onward, violence and violations have steadily decreased but not ceased entirely. Much of Suwayda governorate remains outside of government control and up to 155,000 people remain displaced, still awaiting progress in resolving the political differences that existed at the start of the conflict, and in addressing the grievances created by the violence in July. Such resolution is intertwined with broader process of accountability, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition awaited in the post transitional landscape as a whole.

The violations that took place, predominantly impacting the Druze and Bedouin communities of the governorate, involved complex intercommunal and intracommunal dynamics against an immediate background of 14 years of civil conflict, insecurity, criminal violence and decades of authoritarianism under the former Assad government. Grievances stemming from that period, as well as more recent ones and complex regional dynamics transcending borders had marked the fragile transition. By July, tensions had been rising between local leaders in Suwayda and the Syrian government, with the former divided over engagement with Damascus and concerned about the protection of minority communities in the context of earlier cycles of violence, including in March 2025. At the same time, fledgling efforts towards Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR) engagement had not yet overcome unchecked weapons proliferation and enduring factional loyalties, necessary lustration and vetting and while reforms of the broken judicial system inherited from the Assad era had only just begun. Moreover, military intervention by a neighbouring State, Israel, deepened the complexity of the political and legal realities, and which followed reported covert support to Druze armed groups following the fall of the previous government, to counter Damascus' centralization efforts. In this context is it important to recall the broader international law obligations of all States with respect to the territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Despite the serious and grave violations that occurred, including gross and systematic violations of human rights by government forces, and the need for further investigation concerning acts that may amount to crimes against humanity on the part of members of government forces, as well violations of international humanitarian law that may amount to war crimes by government forces, tribal fighters, and Druze armed groups including those under the Suwayda Military Council, the Commission also noted the common calls for accountability, respect for victims' rights, and the desire to rebuild intercommunal relations from all communities and the government. The commitment to transparency and justice signalled by the government in allowing the Commission's team access to Suwayda is also recognized.

To this end, acknowledging the political dimensions of the conflicts at play and affirming the fundamental applicability of international law obligations for the government and all parties engaged on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic, the report contains a series of recommendations to address the violations documented and take steps to ensure non-repetition, accountability and reparations for the victims.

I. Introduction

1. This report was produced pursuant to the mandate of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (the Commission) from the United Nations Human Rights Council to investigate all alleged violations of international human rights law since March 2011 in the Syrian Arab Republic, including acts that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.¹ It is based on more than 400 interviews, three weeklong missions to the affected areas, and neighbouring governorates hosting IDPs, as well as analysis of satellite, video, and documentary evidence, and official statements.² It outlines serious violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law, where applicable, committed against civilian populations in Suwayda governorate in July 2025.³ It also addresses preceding events in April and May in the Rural Damascus towns of Jaramana and Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya that are linked to those events, and addresses political developments relevant for an understanding of the broader context in which violations occurred. The Commission intends that this report will provide a clear elucidation of the violations that occurred as well as recommendations to assist in elevating the voices of victims and survivors, holding perpetrators accountable and ensuring non-recurrence of violations. The Commission recognises the significant interplay between political developments and triggers for the violence documented in this report. The Commission hopes that the findings contained herein, though they illuminate severe violations that require urgent action, can also assist in making space for inclusive and holistic dialogue and the peaceful resolution of political differences with full respect for the human rights of all. At the outset, the Commission expresses its profound gratitude to all of the victims, survivors, and witnesses who shared their experiences that informed this report, in addition to the various civil society, non-governmental organisations, and humanitarian actors that provided information whether through their public reporting or confidentially.

2. Regarding the events covered in this report, the Commission found that the fighting in Suwayda amounted to a non-international armed conflict as of mid-July that continues to the present, and thus international humanitarian law is the primary legal framework through which those events are analysed. International human rights law was the primary legal framework through which the events that preceded the July escalation are examined, though international human rights law remains concurrently applicable despite the existence of the non-international armed conflict and such standards are also referenced throughout. The Commission notes that a parallel international armed conflict was also occurring throughout this period with respect to Israeli military activity on Syrian territory during this period.⁴

3. The Commission notes that the State remains the primary duty bearer in relation to the respect, protection, promotion, and fulfilment of international human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic. In relation to the non-international armed conflict, all parties, including government forces, including the Internal Security Forces (formerly General Security), and the Syrian Arab Army, as well as the Suwayda-based organized armed groups⁵ and individuals directly participating in hostilities are bound by international humanitarian law applicable in non-international armed conflict. The Commission considers the tribal fighters that accompanied

¹ The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic was established on 22 August 2011 by the Human Rights Council through resolution S-17/1. The mandate of the Commission is to investigate all alleged violations of international human rights law since March 2011 in the Syrian Arab Republic and to present public reports on its findings. The Human Rights Council also tasked the Commission with establishing the facts and circumstances that may amount to such violations and of the crimes perpetrated and, where possible, to identify those responsible with a view of ensuring that perpetrators of violations, including those that may constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes, are held accountable. The Human Rights Council has repeatedly extended the Commission's mandate since then, most recently through resolution 58/25, which was adopted on 4 April 2025. The Commissioners are Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro (Chair), Monia Ammar and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin. The commissioners are Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro (Chair), Monia Ammar and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin.

² See methodology, next section. The Commission was granted access to Suwayda following the adoption of a roadmap for resolving the crisis in Suwayda and stabilizing southern Syria set out in an agreement between the Syrian Arab Republic, the United States and the Kingdom of Jordan on 16 September that requested the Commission to investigate the July events in Suwayda. See <https://sana.sy/en/local/2267905/> and <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/586>.

³ The role played by intersectional identity factors in driving violations is reflected throughout the report, in particular where gender and community affiliation intersect and the manner in which rights are impacted.

⁴ See Annex III, Applicable Law, for further details concerning this analysis.

⁵ Suwayda Military Council and other Suwayda-based armed groups, referred to in the report as SMCAGs. Note that in August 2025, most of these groups coalesced into the Suwayda National Guard umbrella organization for Suwayda-based organised armed groups.

government forces between 14-16 July to have been part of the operation under the effective control of the government forces, with their acts imputable to the State.⁶ For tribal fighters taking part in fighting preceding and after that period, the Commission considers such persons to have been directly participating in hostilities insofar as their conduct is referenced in relation to armed conflict described in this report. Israeli forces conducting operations impacting Syrian territory remain bound by international humanitarian law applicable in international armed conflicts.

4. Following this introduction, the report restates the Commission's methodology in Section II. It then proceeds to provide a more detailed description of the political and military-security context in section III before providing an overview of the patterns of violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including acts that may amount to international crimes, in sections IV and V. It then examines the impact of the ongoing situation in relation to rights and obligations under international human rights and international humanitarian law in section VI. This is followed by the legal findings in section VII and the conclusions and recommendations in section VIII.

5. The report also contains several annexes. Annex I contains several maps of the locations of the incidents detailed in this report, while Annex II includes the detailed factual findings. Annex III summarizes the applicable law, Annex IV contains relevant correspondence with the Government, and Annex V provides a table of violations by location.

II. Methodology

6. In researching and writing this report, the Commission relied on interviews with 409 victims, witnesses, government officials, alleged perpetrators, as well as a range of other interlocutors, between April 2025 and January 2026.⁷ The Commission also visited the affected parts of Suwayda governorate under both government and armed groups' control during three week-long missions to Syria between September and December 2025, including 12 days spent in Suwayda governorate. The Commission expresses its thanks for the access to Suwayda granted by the government, and acknowledges the access facilitated also by local Suwayda authorities to territory controlled by the Suwayda National Guard. During its missions to Suwayda, rural Damascus and Dar'a governorates as well as Damascus city, it met with local government officials, security commanders, witnesses and victims' families. The Commission's secretariat was granted access to a wide range of officials who provided information on the government's actions during the violent events covered in this report and efforts to resume access and services in Suwayda. The team was able to visit many sites and locations where the violence had occurred, as well as locations sheltering displaced people.⁸

7. The Commission sought information on incidents and developments from the Syrian government⁹ and local authorities in Suwayda, and analyzed, authenticated and verified documents, photographs, videos, and satellite imagery from multiple sources, including non-governmental organizations and the UN.

⁶ For the purpose of this report, the term "tribal fighters" refers to diverse groups of armed individuals who are members of tribes. The tribes are bound together by blood lineage ("Asabya qabiliya"), and shared values. They have various and complex alliances and display different levels of organization and coordination across region. Some tribes consider themselves Bedouin, but the term tribal fighters is used broadly and encompasses non-Bedouin tribes as well. Non-Bedouin tribal fighters comprised the majority of those that took part in fighting between 17 and 19 July. The Commission previously documented instances in which such "tribal fighters", also referred to as "tribal forces", played an active role in hostilities in the context of the armed conflict in Syria. See in particular: A/HRC/55/64, paras.90-97, and also A/HRC/57/86, paras. 102-104.

⁷ The date range precedes the July events as the Commission had already been investigating the situations in Jaramana and Acharifyeh-Sahnaya as they were occurring in April and May 2025.

⁸ The Commission notes that it was able to meet with Ministry of Defence officials at the working level on 18 March 2026. It also regrets that actors in areas controlled by the Suwayda National Guard and linked to it at times impeded the work of the Commission's secretariat during its missions.

⁹ A letter containing a request for information on the incidents under investigation for this report was sent to the government on 11 September 2025 (see Annex IV). A draft of the report was shared with the government on 25 February 2026 (see Annex IV), in an effort to allow for comment and reply prior to finalisation of the report. The detailed factual findings were sent to the government on 9 March. The government provided a response on 17 March.

8. The standard of proof for ascribing a human rights or humanitarian law violation was met when there were reasonable grounds to believe that incidents occurred as described.¹⁰ Particular incidents met this standard if the Commission obtained a reliable body of evidence, consistent with other information, indicating their occurrence. The incidents described in this report were the subject of two or more consistent and reliable primary accounts, which were often supported by additional corroborating evidence.¹¹ In the case of torture and ill-treatment, sexual and gender-based crimes, including rape, and other incidents where the survivor was the only available primary source for the event in question, such events were corroborated through pattern analysis or when combined with other information, such as site visits, medical records, or visible injuries. The patterns described in the report were considered established when there were multiple events that shared common elements and perpetrators over a period of time such that a corroborative pattern of conduct had been established. When the Commission has reasonable grounds to believe that conduct entailing individual criminal responsibility has occurred, it attributes it to a party to the conflict where possible.

9. The Commission is guided by the principle of “do no harm” in all of its work and maintains strict confidentiality regarding all information provided by sources and witnesses. It only uses information subject to the informed consent of sources. In both the conduct of its interview and the use of information, the Commission sought to minimize potential repercussions for interviewees and providers of information by assessment of protection risks prior to engaging with potential sources and in the presentation of facts in this report. In some cases, the Commission was unable to mitigate potential for harm and did not undertake certain interviews. In others, it is unable to present information obtained due to risks involved in potentially identifying individuals in a manner that could risk reprisals.

10. The Commission has specially trained sexual and gender-based violence investigators who lead such investigations and advise other investigators on best practices and victim support.¹² Any interaction with child interviewees was limited to where parents or legal guardians were present and only after assessing the child’s ability to take part in any part of an interview and whether it was consistent with the best interests of the child to proceed. Such engagement was kept to an absolute minimum, with due regard for the risk of traumatization. Where possible, the Commission sought to refer witnesses and victims to potential service providers, in particular for medical and psychosocial referrals, though this was not always possible.

11. The overall scale of alleged violations is greater than reflected in the detailed incidents reflected in this report – as the information presented in this report is limited to that which the Commission could investigate within time and resource constraints, and which met its standard of proof. The presentation of facts is further limited by that which it was able to present following review for protection concerns for individuals.¹³

III. Political and Military Context and Sequence of Events

Background to the July events, including the political and military landscape

12. The eruption of violence in Suwayda followed months of tensions between the government in Damascus and influential local actors in Suwayda due to mistrust by some leaders in Suwayda of the new authorities in Damascus as well as fears of political marginalization in a context where Suwayda had gained a certain level of self-governance in the years prior to the fall of the Assad government. It further unfolded in the context of long-standing tensions between Druze and Bedouin communities, which were exacerbated further following the fall of the previous government. Years of diminished state presence in the governorate had allowed for the

¹⁰ A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1, paras. 7-10; A/HRC/19/69 at para. 10

¹¹ For further elucidation of methodological practices for human rights fact-findings, see, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Col_Guidance_and_Practice.pdf

¹² The role played by intersectional identity factors in driving violations is reflected throughout the report, in particular where gender and community affiliation intersect and the manner in which rights are impacted.

¹³ Due to the UN regular budget (RB) liquidity crisis, the Commission alongside other UN HRC-mandated investigative bodies was forced to operate with only approximately half of its RB approved staffing and a fraction of its RB non-post resources during the second half of 2025, severely restricting its capacity. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptedDTbsPEU>.

proliferation of drug smuggling and other illicit activities and contributed to the widespread availability of weapons.¹⁴ Longstanding contestation over pasture, water rights, and borderlands were exacerbated by prolonged drought and the ongoing effects of climate change in the region. Disputes over grazing, mobility, economic uncertainty, illicit trade and security had produced an environment in which isolated incidents regularly escalated into violent confrontations or abductions between armed community members.¹⁵ Nevertheless, conflicts were often rapidly resolved through mediation by local notables (both religious and secular), a point repeatedly stressed to the Commission by leaders and interlocutors from all different communities.

13. Following the fall of the Assad-led government on 8 December 2024, Suwayda witnessed shifting dynamics between Druze leaders and the new central government. While the new authorities sought to expand state control across a unified Syrian territory, inclusive of Suwayda some Druze leaders were reluctant to disarm or fully accept state security deployment in the governorate. The community's leadership in Suwayda, both religious and secular, held diverging views on engagement with the new authorities, as well as the type of governance model the new Syria should adopt. One of the three Sheikhs Al Aql, the highest spiritual authorities for the Druze in Suwayda, Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri, was reluctant to engage with the new authorities in Damascus,¹⁶ expressing concern about decisions taken by the central government as it related to the transition and calling for course correction, while nevertheless engaging with government officials, including the Governor of Suwayda.¹⁷

14. Suwayda, which had had a unique status in Syria for both demographic and historical reasons, sought to maintain a certain level of autonomy it had previously been permitted, including during the rule of the Assad-led government. During that period, the leaders of Suwayda had managed to avoid much of the violence that swept other parts of the country, with many largely avoiding joining either the Assad-led forces or the opposition. The majority of young men did not perform mandatory military service, opting instead to form local armed groups to defend their territory from any external threats, or were often allowed to serve in Suwayda. Nevertheless, the Assad-led government maintained its repressive security and intelligence apparatus, despite tolerating, and in some cases reportedly coordinating, with local Suwayda-based armed groups. Support for such local self-protection further increased in the wake of a 2018 Daesh attack on Suwayda which resulted in the killing of more than 200 people and the abduction of more than 30.¹⁸ Toward the end of Assad's rule, residents began protests due to growing economic grievances, and called for democratic reforms that persisted until the fall of that government.¹⁹

15. Against this background, discussions between Damascus and local Suwayda leaders were initiated in view of finding agreement on the integration of Suwayda into state institutions. Political engagement, including meetings between Druze factions and Damascus officials, took place from late 2024 to mid-2025. While some progress was noted, including the creation of a local police force with Druze officers, talks were hindered by divisions within the Druze leadership, mistrust of the government's intentions as well as disagreement over decentralization. Though significant Druze leaders engaged with the new government in Damascus to reach agreement on the integration of Suwayda, Sheikh al-Hijri repeatedly expressed concern about the authorities' past and its implications for the rights of religious minorities in Syria. He also expressed concerns that the Constitutional Declaration, the provisional constitution during the 5-year transitional period, — was exclusionary and failed to reflect Syria's diversity.²⁰

¹⁴ A/HRC/57/86, paras 39-40. Note that while there is no reliable data concerning demographics of the population of Suwayda governorate at present, the Druze community is by far the largest component, followed by large number of Christians of various denominations, and a significant Bedouin community, with smaller populations of non-Bedouin Sunni and Alawites, among other communities.

¹⁵ See e.g. from the Commission's prior reports A/HRC/45/31, 2020, para. 16.

¹⁶ In Syria there are three Sheikhs al-Aql, or Sheikhs of Reason, who are the highest spiritual and social authorities of the Druze community in the country, all of whom are based in Suwayda, including Sheikh al-Aql Hikmat al-Hijri, Sheikh al-Aql Hammoud al-Hinawi, and Sheikh al-Aql Youssef al-Jarbou.

¹⁷ <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2025/03/governor-of-as-suwayda-signs-understanding-agreement-with-al-hijri-key-details-unveiled/>

¹⁸ A/HRC/40/70, paras 36-43.

¹⁹ The weekly protests in Suwayda took a decisive anti-government stand as of August 2023. See: A/HRC/55/64, para. 52.

²⁰ See for instance: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/16edSqXwqy/>

16. Nevertheless, an agreement was reached with local leaders to reactivate institutions of the State. Subsequently, the government appointed Mustapha al-Bakkour as Governor. The Governor entered office amid widespread mistrust, collapsed state structures and damaged infrastructure, and despite threats from armed groups, sought to rebuild confidence through outreach efforts. Different views on these processes were recounted among local leaders and interlocutors, but the Commission recognize there was a desire by leaders in Suwayda for full inclusion and consultation in all local and national processes, as government authorities sought to restore State functions. While acknowledging that similar processes of national administrative and security integration were being sought nationwide, the relative independence of Suwayda under the previous government, created additional contestation and complexity.

17. Despite the Governor's earnest attempts to bridge the gaps between the residents of Suwayda and the government in Damascus, the state of insecurity that partly reigned in the governorate, combined with the limited presence of security forces and the contestation of Damascus' authority, culminated in the governor being assaulted and briefly detained on 21 May, by armed group members in Suwayda. Local armed groups close to Sheikh al Hijri reportedly demanded the release of a man held on criminal charges in Damascus and the governor was later released. Though the governor then tendered his resignation, it was not accepted by the government and instead he continued his administrative duties from outside the governorate. The incident demonstrated the complex security landscape in the governorate as tensions continued to rise.

18. Inside Suwayda, several armed factions had operated for many years, and by this time held diverging views on whether to cooperate with the new government.²¹ Before December 2024, Druze armed factions in Suwayda were fragmented and differed in their relationship with the former government. Some maintained implicit coordination with former government security services or operated in informal security and smuggling roles, others remained neutral and focused on local community protection while avoiding confrontation with Damascus, and a third group openly rejected former government authority and refused conscription. Rijal al-Karama (Men of Dignity), founded in 2014, had by the end of 2024 emerged as the largest and most socially rooted faction, relying on community funding, local legitimacy, and decentralized organization, while maintaining relative autonomy from both the former government and the formal opposition.

19. After the former government's collapse in December 2024, the governing and military landscape in Suwayda shifted as many former Assad-era government soldiers and officers remained in Suwayda and integrated into local factions. This accelerated organizational consolidation while simultaneously raising fears of former government forces' influence and culture of impunity, as measures to ensure accountability for serious human rights violations and guarantees of non-repetition remain to be implemented. This process led to more structured bodies such as the Suwayda Military Council. Funding patterns also evolved, moving beyond local and diaspora support toward structured external assistance. Israel reportedly expanded covert support to Druze militias after the collapse to counter Damascus's centralization efforts, contributing—alongside the later formation of the Suwayda National Guard, (see below)—to a more institutionalized yet fragmented armed and political environment. Politically however, Sheikh al-Hijri's influence and position was only firmly cemented after the violence in July. In the months prior, the residents of Suwayda held diverging views and aligned themselves with various leaders, religious or otherwise.

20. Mistrust also affected the Bedouin community, a large minority in the governorate, which remained marginalized and inadequately represented in the local political landscape. Their lack of influence and representation in local governance and the governorate's institutions had been a feature also during the Assad era, despite their long historic presence and significant numbers in Suwayda. With the fall of the former government, Bedouin communities hoped that their long-standing marginalization and limited development would come to an end, heightening further tensions with some in the Druze community whose influence and control had increased in the years prior.

21. Separate from clashes that took place periodically between Bedouin and Druze communities in Suwayda, the former government had also targeted Bedouins across the country during the previous conflict with summary executions and arbitrary detention for their perceived

²¹ Such groups included, Rijal al-Karama (Men of Dignity), Sheikh Alkarama Forces, and the Jabal Brigade, among others.

ties to former anti-government armed groups.²² In Suwayda, the Bedouin community also recalled previous waves of displacement during Assad-led governments' rule, and widespread discrimination and marginalization, including in access to social and economic rights including education. Between 2014 and 2020, many from the Bedouin communities fled their homes and were unable to return due to the destruction of local infrastructure and homes during clashes. In 2018, government forces had also bulldozed a number of Bedouin villages, adding to the grievances experienced by the community.

22. In addition to local contextual grievances around political representation and governance, at the national level for the Druze community and at the local one for the Bedouin community, the events in Suwayda occurred in the wake of earlier grave violence committed against Alawite civilians in coastal and western central Syria in March 2025,²³ as well as clashes targeting the Druze community in Jaramana and Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya in Rural Damascus and in Sura al-Kabira in April and May 2025, following the circulation of an audio recording insulting the Prophet Mohammad and wrongly attributed to a Druze Sheikh (see below Annex II, section A). Israeli conducted several airstrikes on locations in Damascus and rural Damascus between 30 April and 3 May that were framed as responses to violence against the Druze community, including a strike on 2 May just 400 meters from the presidential palace, foreshadowing the Israeli strikes that would take place in July.²⁴ While the context and triggers of each of these escalations were different, they all ignited sectarian strife and deepened mistrust in the authorities' ability to protect all Syrians and unify the country during the transitional period. The lack of visible and concrete accountability for perpetrators of the violence in March, and during the previous conflict, also added to the trust deficit.

23. Furthermore, changes to local security structures in April significantly reduced stabilising forces in the area, contributing to a security vacuum in the period preceding the July escalation - with Rijal al-Karama ("Men of Dignity"), the largest Druze armed faction, establishing checkpoints across several western Suwayda villages.

24. A fragile security arrangement had been reached on 30 April 2025 between Druze leaders and the new authorities in Damascus—tasking Internal Security Forces (ISF), formerly General Security, with securing the Damascus–Suwayda highway.²⁵ However, this agreement failed to stop security incidents from occurring. Multiple credible sources reported extortion, theft, and abductions of Druze travellers at ISF-run checkpoints staffed by Bedouin or tribal force members along the route.²⁶ Repeated appeals to replace checkpoint personnel, including by some government officials, went unanswered.

25. In early July 2025, a series of kidnappings, clashes in the Suwayda city neighbourhood of Maqwas²⁷ and assaults on Druze property intensified tensions along the already volatile Damascus–Suwayda road. At that point, the delay by government forces in addressing the security situation along this vital road was believed by some in the Druze community to be intentional, to demonstrate the need for its services.

Triggering event

26. Within this context, the immediate trigger for the escalation was the abduction on 11 July of a Druze merchant near the Khirbat Al-Shayab checkpoint. The following day, on 12 July, Druze fighters abducted several Bedouin men in response. Several subsequent mediation attempts failed, and gunfire was reported that evening across several northern and western

²² A/HRC/24/46, para. 102, A/HRC/23/58, para. 45, A/HRC/25/65, para 21.

²³ A/HRC/59/CRP.4

²⁴ 2025-05-21_secco_un_special_envoy_for_syria_mr_geir_o_pedersen_briefing_as_delivered__1.pdf, See also: <https://www.idf.il/%D7%90%D7%AA%D7%A8%D7%99-%D7%99%D7%97%D7%99%D7%93%D7%95%D7%AA/%D7%99%D7%95%D7%9E%D7%9F-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%9C%D7%97%D7%9E%D7%94/%D7%99%D7%95%D7%9E%D7%9F-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%9C%D7%97%D7%9E%D7%94-%D7%AA%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%A6%D7%91-%D7%9C%D7%90%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%9A-%D7%94%D7%99%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%9D/%D7%99%D7%95%D7%9E%D7%9F-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%9C%D7%97%D7%9E%D7%94-30-04-25/>

²⁵ Sweida governor: Security agreement in the governorate comes at initiative of Sweida residents

²⁶ See for instance: [مصدر في الأمن الداخلي... - Alikhbaria Syria الإخبارية السورية | Facebook](#),

²⁷ A Suwayda city mixed neighbourhood predominantly inhabited by Bedouins, see below Annex II, section B.

localities.²⁸ Early on 13 July, Bedouin fighters, responded by, in turn, abducting Druze men at temporary checkpoints erected in Suwayda city's Maqwas neighbourhood. Druze armed groups then surrounded the area, and exchanges of heavy machine-gun and mortar fire followed. Verified open-source videos showed active combat in residential streets of Maqwas (See Annex II, Section (B) below for more details). Simultaneously, the Commission received credible accounts that tribal fighters organised themselves and attacked Tira and other villages, burning homes and displacing civilians.

27. As fighting escalated in Maqwas on 13 July, localized calls for tribal mobilisation were issued from tribal leaders, following which tribal fighters²⁹ mobilized from areas neighbouring the governorate towards Suwayda city along several axes. Northern villages on the Damascus–Suwayda highway Sura al-Kabira, Khalkhaleh, and Hazim came under attack, cutting access to the governorate, while tribal fighters advanced from Busra al-Harir through western villages where they controlled Al-Tira village. Fighting lasted through the night in Kanaker and Thaale.³⁰

28. Efforts to de-escalate the situation continued by religious and political leaders and dignitaries on both sides. During the night of 13-14 July, a detainee exchange occurred and fighting stopped in Maqwas and Western villages. Subsequently, three major waves of violence against Druze and Bedouin civilians followed, as described below.

Government-announced operation to restore order starts: First major wave of violence

29. In the morning of 14 July, the Ministries of Defence and Interior publicly announced a formal intervention to restore order,³¹ having prior to that, during the preceding night, informed the main Druze leaders of their intention to enter the governorate.

30. The Interior and Defence Ministries proceeded to establish a joint operations room, under the leadership of the then Commander of Internal Security Forces in Suwayda and eventually deploying approximately 4,000 personnel.³²

31. Amidst these developments, an delegation from the Ministries of Interior and Defence led by the ISF operational commander sought to convene a meeting in Mazraa village on 14 July between senior government forces commanders and various Druze leaders aimed at paving the way for the entry of government forces with minimal violence. Aside from the owner of the guesthouse, none of the other invited Druze leaders attended. The Commission verified that phone calls also occurred that evening, including one with Sheikh Al Hijri.

32. However, as large government convoys, with tribal fighters operating in tandem, advanced on 14 July towards Suwayda city from several directions, they encountered armed resistance from Suwayda Military Council (an armed coalition established in February 2025 in the Druze-majority Suwayda Governorate following the fall of the Assad government) and other Suwayda-based armed groups, referred to hereinafter as SMCAGs, along the road from Busra al-Harir (Dar'a governorate) toward Suwayda, with 16 soldiers and five ISF members reported

²⁸ Clashes notably erupted in Atil, Rima Hazem, Mansoura and in Mazraa.

²⁹ For the purpose of this report, the term “tribal fighters” refers to diverse groups of armed individuals who are members of tribes. The tribes are bound together by blood lineage (“*Asabya qabiliya*”), and shared values. They have various and complex alliances and display different levels of organization and coordination across region. Some tribes consider themselves Bedouin, but the term tribal fighters is used broadly and encompasses non-Bedouin tribes as well. Non-Bedouin tribal fighters comprised the majority of those that took part in fighting between 17 and 19 July. The Commission previously documented instances in which such “tribal fighters”, also referred to as “tribal forces”, played an active role in hostilities in the context of the armed conflict in Syria. See in particular: A/HRC/55/64, paras.90-97, and also A/HRC/57/86, paras. 102-104.

³⁰ See for instance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeowRVXJ7wI>

³¹ See e.g. two statements issued on 14 July by the Ministry of Interior. A first one was issued around dawn (i.e. 6 a.m. Damascus time), announcing the upcoming operation and its purpose, <https://t.me/syrianmoi/25030>. A second statement, issued 12 hours later announced that forces from the Ministries of Defence and Interior entered Suwayda to maintain security and protect civilians without discrimination, see <https://t.me/syrianmoi/25031>.

³² Units from several formations affiliated with the Ministry of Defence were assigned to take part in the operations within their areas of responsibility, including the 40th Division, the 70th Divisions, and the 44th Special Operations Division, in addition to the Republican Guard. Forces from the central sector's area of responsibility were also involved, notably the 42nd Mechanized Infantry Division and the 52nd Division, as well as elements from other formations such as the 54th and 82nd Divisions. The Syrian government, in its response of 17 March to the Commission's draft report, noted that many of the deployed ISF and Syrian Arab Army forces were themselves also members of or related to tribes that were involved in the Suwayda events.

killed, while at least five others were captured and featured in videos where they were beaten, slapped, and had their hair cut off in a manner meant to humiliate or degrade them.³³ During this same advance, violent home raids in Druze majority villages commenced, as detailed in Section IV and Annex II, section C, below.

33. Government forces convoys were subsequently also attacked by multiple Israeli airstrikes, including near Kanaker and Mazraa, and the former 12th Brigade premises in Dar'a, inflicting further losses.³⁴

34. The following day, on 15 July, government security forces and accompanying tribal fighters reached Suwayda city. Governmental security forces including armoured units entered from multiple axes, reaching Omran Roundabout in the morning.

35. Sheikh al-Hijri initially welcomed the entry of government forces, calling on local factions not to resist earlier that same morning,³⁵ upon which the Minister of Defence announced a complete cessation of fire following the agreement with the city's notables and elders.³⁶ However, after the entry of government troops alongside tribal fighters, and ensuing reports of massacres (detailed in sections IV and Annex II, Sections C-D, below), Sheikh al-Hijri reversed his stance, urging armed resistance³⁷ and calling for international protection.³⁸

36. Against this background, shelling resumed, including striking civilian neighbourhoods. Renewed Israeli airstrikes rhetorically premised on protection of Druze on government forces in Suwayda city reportedly inflicted heavy losses.³⁹ Electricity and telecommunications were cut during the operations, impeding civilian communication and affecting civilian access to essential services.⁴⁰ By nightfall, Suwayda's western and central districts were under government security forces control, amid widespread looting and fires, marking the culmination of the government's offensive. During the night of 15–16 July, SMCAGs briefly regained several neighbourhoods. By the morning of 16 July, however, government forces and tribal fighters had reasserted control over key areas, amid disturbing reports of violence against civilians.

37. The period 14-16 July marked the first major wave of violence against civilians described in this report (see sections IV and Annex II, Section C, below). In the cases documented by the Commission, many members of government forces – alongside accompanying irregular tribal fighters – took part in violations against the civilian population or did not intervene when present and violations were taking place. Some carried swords and some wore patches displaying the Shahada on their uniforms.⁴¹ In a few cases, security forces intervened to stop physical harm to

³³ See Annex II, Section H below. Also see: <https://sana.sy/en/local/364367/>

³⁴ The IDF announced it attacked tanks in order to disrupt their access to the area, clarifying that “the presence of these means in southern Syria may pose a threat to the State of Israel.” *War Diary - 14/07/25 | Ets*

³⁵ See (20+) *الرئاسة الزوجية للموحدين الدروز* - الرئاسة المؤسفة التي طالت... | Facebook

³⁶ See https://x.com/Murhaf_abuqasra/status/1945040757397561494

³⁷ The participants in the Druze armed resistance included Druze armed factions opposed to government and aligned with Sheikh al-Hijri. Their composition shifted gradually, to eventually include Rijal al-Karama (Men of Dignity), the largest and most influential faction, alongside the Suwayda Military Council, Liwa al-Jabal, and other local militias affiliated with Hijri's network. These groups participated in coordinated operations and attacks across multiple localities, including Umm Zaytun, Shahba, Sahwet Balata, al-Harabee and al-Maqwas, using organized armed groups and heavy weapons. A joint operations room was established to coordinate the actions of the participating factions. In parallel, government local police that were recruited from the Druze community also took part fighting against the government forces, as well as Druze civilians who took up arms individually.

³⁸ See <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=595406190303051>. See also <https://www.facebook.com/100089249525829/videos/742001284869468>

³⁹ <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/spoke-joint150725>

⁴⁰ Suwayda residents consistently reported that mobile phone networks and Internet experienced serious disruption as of 15 July, hampering their ability to receive and share information as military operations were ongoing. Based on expert technical analysis provided by the Monash IP Observatory (Monash IP Observatory (SoDa Labs, Monash University) / KASPR Datahaus PTY LTD), active network measurements indicate a significant disruption of internet connectivity in Suwayda in July 2025. The analysis identified an initial loss of connectivity on 15 July, first observed in Ariqa eastern side of Suwayda, followed by wider and more severe outages from 16 July onward affecting the area, including multiple days with zero connectivity. According to the analysis, the most intense period of disruption appears to be over 16-21 July, during which simultaneous outages across multiple locations severely restricted internet access and digital communications across the governorate. The Monash IP Observatory an independent research initiative of Monash University, see <https://ip-observatory.org>.

⁴¹ The Muslim profession of faith ('there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah'). Black patches with the Shahada written in white is often associated with Da'esh fighters.

civilians. There was also some attempt, at least at the outset of operations in the western villages, to provide phone numbers to contact government forces in case of problems or to indicate that a house had already been searched, though these were wholly ineffective in preventing subsequent violations. As will be described below, documented violations include widespread murders, direct and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, arbitrary arrests and abductions, torture and ill-treatment, pillage, attacks on civilian property, sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, and outrages upon personal dignity, and attacks on buildings dedicated to religion accompanied by discriminatory sectarian insults aimed primarily at the Druze community. These constitute violations of Article 3 Common to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, customary international humanitarian law, and violations of international human rights law, including fundamental non-derogable rights.⁴² These patterns of violations occurred during combing operations and house raids but also when encountering civilians in the streets. Among the outrages upon personal dignity recorded during this time was the cutting of the moustaches of elderly Druze men, a deeply offensive and humiliating act for the Druze community. In many of these instances, the fighters recorded themselves and broadcast their violations on social media, reinforcing a sense of impunity.⁴³ Such broadcasting of egregious human rights violations echoed patterns of behaviour by armed groups during the preceding Syrian conflict which have been universally condemned by the international community. On 16 July, the Syrian Presidency positively issued a statement condemning "these shameful acts" and vowing to investigate all related incidents and holding the responsible accountable.⁴⁴

38. Also on July 16th, Israel launched a new series of airstrikes across southern Syria, including on military convoys and key command-and-control facilities, causing massive significant casualties amongst government forces.⁴⁵ Beginning shortly after midday on 16 July, several Israeli airstrikes struck the Ministry of Defence's General Staff complex located at the Umayyad Square in the heart of Damascus, which hosts senior command functions, as well as other sites used for operational coordination and multiple impact sites.⁴⁶ The strike on the General Staff complex killed at least one civilian and injured 34 other civilians. Many staff had evacuated following a reported "roof knock" strike before explosive ordinance was launched though the complex sits in central Damascus alongside busy city roads. These airstrikes, broadcast live on national TV, shocked and disrupted Syrian command structures and contributed to a temporary halt in ground operations. A ceasefire between government forces and SMCAGs was announced later on 16 July, though compliance varied among Druze factions, with some leaders rejecting the agreement.⁴⁷

39. According to media reports, the Syrian government believed it had been given a green light from the United States and Israel to deploy troops to Suwayda to restore order.⁴⁸ While the U.S. Secretary of State later alluded to a "misunderstanding"⁴⁹ between the two countries, President al-Sharaa stated during a speech on 17 July that Israel, which has "targeted the country's stability and sought to create discord among Syrians since the fall of the former government, was once again seeking to transform the country into an "arena of endless chaos".⁵⁰ The Israeli airstrikes followed hundreds of previous Israeli airstrikes violating the territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic since the fall of the former government and increased political interventions in Syria, including attempts to cultivate contacts with local leaders in Suwayda and provide incentives for Syrian Druze to engage with Israel,⁵¹ including by reportedly providing weapons.

40. Regular claims by Israel that it is the "protector" of the Druze community in Syria, combined with Sheikh al-Hijri's calls for international protection⁵², led to allegations of treason

⁴² See Sections IV, VII and Annex III (Applicable Law).

⁴³ The Syrian government, in its response of 17 March to the Commission's draft report, stated that the perpetrators were arrested. The Commission is seeking further clarification. See Section IV., below.

⁴⁴ archive.sana.sy

⁴⁵ <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/470>

⁴⁶ War Diary - 16/07 | Ets; See also: <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/spoke-syria170725>. This incident is examined in the Commission's forthcoming report to the 61st session of the Human Rights Council.

⁴⁷ <https://archive.sana.sy/en/?p=364634>

⁴⁸ Exclusive: Syria believed it had green light from US, Israel to deploy troops to Sweida | Reuters

⁴⁹ See the statement by Secretary Rubio on Syria on U.S. Department of State YouTube channel

⁵⁰ See: (1) كلمة السيد الرئيس أحمد الشرع حول تطورات الأوضاع في السويداء واعتداءات الكيان الإسرائيلي " on X: " رئاسة الجمهورية العربية السورية #رئاسة_الجمهورية_العربية_السورية <https://t.co/rjehzUndD> / X

⁵¹ Katz says Israel will soon allow Syrian Druze to work in the Golan Heights | The Times of Israel

⁵² <https://x.com/suwayda24/status/1917884914596499778>

and collaboration with the “enemy”, even though other prominent Sheikhs, including Sheikh al-Aql Hammoud al-Hinawi had dismissed Israel’s offer to protect the Druze community and asserted instead the community’s ability to defend itself.

Withdrawal of government forces: Second major wave of violence

41. Following the 16 July ceasefire, government forces and tribal fighters accompanying them withdrew from Suwayda city and most villages that evening.⁵³ In the wake of their withdrawal, Bedouin civilians in Suwayda faced attacks by Suwayda Military Council and other Suwayda-based armed groups (SMCAGs) marking the second major wave of violence against civilians (see Section V and Annex II, section E, below). Bedouin civilian communities were attacked in and around Shahba town to the north of Suwayda and also in areas to the south, including in Sahwet Balata and neighbouring villages, subject to violent raids and eventually transferred out of Suwayda government. During this wave of violence, SMCAGs engaged in murder, direct and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary detention, forced displacement, outrages upon personal dignity, attacks on buildings dedicated to religion and pillage directed at the Bedouin community. As in the case of government forces, treatment was not uniform, with some SMCAGs directing more violence toward civilians as compared to others. Such attacks forced tens of thousands of Bedouins to leave the Druze-held areas of the governorate, ultimately resulting the displacement of nearly all Bedouins from the areas under control of SMCAGs by the end of July 2025.

Tribal mobilization: Third major wave of violence

42. Across social media platforms, reports of such violations rapidly spread, alongside hate speech and misinformation (see below Annex II, section J.), fuelling the mobilization of thousands of tribal fighters from outside Suwayda. Despite the fact that such tribal mobilizations were ostensibly to aid Bedouin communities in Suwayda, most interlocutors indicated that there were no substantive ties between the Bedouins of Suwayda and the tribal fighters who entered the area.⁵⁴ Several armed tribes declared a tribal mobilization (*Faz‘at al-‘Asha‘ir*) on 17 and 18 July⁵⁵ and converged on Suwayda along the Damascus–Suwayda highway—reaching Dhikr north of the city—and through Dar’a’s countryside, assembling in Walgha in the west.⁵⁶ Limited but intense clashes between tribal fighters and Druze armed elements were reported in Mazraa, Sura al-Kabira, Tira, Lubayn, and Walgha. Tribal fighters also entered neighbourhoods around Rdhaimat Ellewa and advanced toward Shahba, reaching the outer reaches of the city.

43. By 18 July, groups of tribal fighters had established control over several rural areas, prompting thousands of civilians who had remained or returned after the withdrawal of government forces to flee toward Suwayda city or west toward Dar’a. One government official estimated that up to 80,000 tribal fighters had mobilized across southern Syria, though this figure could not be independently verified. Government forces, though at this point positioned along the main roads, failed to prevent these forces from reaching Suwayda fuelling speculation that it was facilitated by such forces. Credible reports of the use of drones, mortars and heavy machine guns during the advance of tribal fighters were also received. During this advance, some members of the Syrian Arab Army and the Internal Security Forces shed their uniforms and joined the tribal fighters that entered Suwayda governorate.

44. During the advance, there was widespread looting and systematic burning of nearly every home in 35 mixed or predominantly Druze villages by tribal fighters, along with killings and

⁵³ <https://archive.sana.sy/?p=2249685>

⁵⁴ The Commission noted on multiple visits to Bedouin displaced persons sites across Dar’a and Rural Damascus that the displacement sites included isolated barren fields or abandoned buildings, with extremely limited services available and poor-quality tents (for those hosted in open areas), and a few cases of overcrowded hotels, highlighting the Suwayda Bedouins’ isolation from their host communities while in displacement.

⁵⁵ See for instance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yilT9bpILQ>

⁵⁶ The Commission has credible information that the following tribes took part in the mobilization though it cannot to its standard of proof assign responsibility for violations to specific tribes: Jabor Tribe, Al-Bakara tribe, Al-Azwa tribe, Busaraya tribe, Qais Ailan tribe, Al-Zubaidi clan, Abu Muslim clan, Suwayda Bedouins, Lajat tribes, Al-Bubna clan, Naim Tribe, Al-Bukhabur tribe, Bushaban tribe, Bongad clan, Deir ez-Zor Al-Aqeedat tribe, Al-Mawali tribe, and Turkmen tribes from Homs and Hama.

abductions of civilians who had not fled from the earlier government advance or who had returned to their villages on 17 July. This included elderly and disabled men and women whose bodies were located later, in many cases months after the ceasefire. Bodies were left in homes, in the streets and in fields, and in some cases burned or otherwise mutilated. During this third major wave of violence, tribal fighters during this time engaged in murder, arbitrary detention, outrages upon personal dignity, pillage, attacks on civilian objects, and attacks on religious buildings. Up to 35 villages across the western and northern countryside were deliberately burnt and destroyed between 13 and 20 July, with the most systematic looting and burning taking place on 18 and 19 July during the tribal mobilization, though both continued afterward as well.⁵⁷

45. On 19 July, a ceasefire was announced; however, tribal fighters reportedly continued to carry out attacks on villages in the western and northern countryside and in some parts of Suwayda city, though they had largely withdrawn from the governorate by 20 July.

46. Between 19 and 20 July, government internal security forces redeployed to parts of western and northern rural Suwayda and stated its intention to separate armed actors and reopen limited humanitarian corridors. The following day, on 21 July, approximately 1,500 Bedouin civilians trapped inside Suwayda city were evacuated under the supervision of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC). More such evacuations followed over subsequent weeks. Sporadic violations continued however throughout late July, although large-scale offensives subsided. On 30 July, the government, Jordan and SARC evacuated more than one hundred foreign nationals.⁵⁸

47. The above violence occurred despite statements by President Ahmed al-Sharaa, in a statement from 16,⁵⁹ and speeches on 17⁶⁰ and 19⁶¹ July, calling for an end to violence and condemning "these shameful acts" and vowing to investigate all related incidents and holding those responsible accountable. In both the speeches of 17 and 19 July President al-Sharaa emphasized that the Druze are an integral part of the nation's fabric. In the 19 July speech, while the President described some Druze factions as "separatist", "outlaw groups" he stressed that the entire Druze community constituted "a fundamental pillar of the Syrian national fabric" and should not be judged by the actions of such groups. The same speech also praised "the tribes" for their "heroic and noble stances", noting that "Arab tribes have always symbolized the noble values and principles that drive them to rise and support the oppressed" and acknowledging their need to defend themselves independently during recent challenges, while stressing that their role does not replace the role of the State.

48. The scale of violations committed during the three waves of violence affected both Suwayda city and dozens of Druze, Bedouin, and mixed villages in the western, northern and southern countryside, see maps in Annex I. Nearly 200,000 people were displaced.⁶² The Commission's conservative figures indicate that at least 1,700 people were killed in the events. The Commission received information on deaths from multiple sources, including victims' family members, community leaders, activists, and humanitarian and medical workers. The majority of the deaths reported to the Commission affected the local Druze community, with 1,190 men, 99 women, 22 boys, and 31 girls reported killed. The smaller local Bedouin community also suffered fatalities, with 53 men, 9 women, 5 boys, and 3 girls confirmed killed. At least 225 members of government forces were also reported killed (134 as reported by the Ministry of Defence and 91 by the Ministry of Interior), many of them in Israeli airstrikes between 14 and 16 July in Suwayda and Damascus.

49. The Commission has not yet received any estimates of deaths among tribal fighters. It notes, however, that the Suwayda National Inquiry reported 140 victims from tribes and

⁵⁷ The Commission visited dozens of villages in northern and western rural Suwayda between September and December 2025, confirming the burning of affected village. For corroboration of date and location data concerning widespread burning of civilian property during this time, see also NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System, part of the NASA Earth Science Data and Information System (ESDIS) which provides partial coverage of the events at <https://firms.modaps.eosdis.nasa.gov/map/#d:2025-07-18..2025-07-19;@36.62,32.81,10.47z> (<https://www.earthdata.nasa.gov/data/tools/firms>).

⁵⁸ https://www.petra.gov.jo/Include/InnerPage.jsp?ID=74074&lang=en&name=en_news

⁵⁹ سوريا تدعو الانتهاكات بحق أهلنا في السويداء وتتعهد بمحاسبة المتورطين – S A N A

⁶⁰ كلمة السيد الرئيس أحمد الشرع حول تطورات الأوضاع في السويداء واعتداءات الكيان الإسرائيلي " on X: " رئاسة الجمهورية العربية السورية (1) <https://t.co/rjehzUndD> / X

⁶¹ خطاب رئاسة الجمهورية العربية السورية حول أحداث محافظة السويداء عقب إعلان وقف إطلاق النار " on X: " رئاسة الجمهورية العربية السورية (1) <https://t.co/xLrmt8WtDc> / X

⁶² <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-flash-update-no-5-escalation-hostilities-sweida-governorate-31-july-2025>

Bedouins documented by name.⁶³ This may suggest that the death toll among tribal fighters is around 70, after subtracting the approximately 70 deaths already reported to the Commission by Bedouin community members.

50. In total, the Commission's received credible reports that at least 1,707 people were killed.⁶⁴

51. On 31 July, the Ministry of Justice issued a decree (No. 1287 of 2025), establishing an independent National Inquiry to investigate atrocities committed in Suwayda in July 2025, which the Commission welcomed. The Inquiry was mandated to uncover the facts, determine responsibility, and ensure justice for victims, in connection with all three major waves of violence against civilians described above.⁶⁵ The Commission met with its members in September and December 2025 to exchange experiences about good practices for independent investigations. Further details on its work are described in Section VI, below.

Situation post 19 July ceasefire

52. Since the fragile ceasefire was reached on 19 July it has mostly held, though sporadic clashes, including intra-Druze clashes, continue to occur. In the absence of a dialogue over the core grievances that fuelled the escalation – including political marginalization, contested authority, and mistrust of government security forces — or tangible progress to ensure accountability for violations of international humanitarian and human rights, the situation is likely to remain precarious. The violence in Suwayda has further created a deep rift between the Druze communities and the government, with some in the Druze leadership calling for autonomy or independence from Syria, a goal they believe can be reached with the support of the Druze community in Israel as well as indicated by the Israeli Government's public declaration that it will serve as the protector of the community.⁶⁶ However, others in Suwayda do not align with that project and have sought to create alternative visions for resolving the current conflict.

53. In August, several Druze factions in Suwayda unified to form the National Guard, a new umbrella force created to coordinate local defence. The formation incorporated fighters who had previously served in the former Assad-led government forces, marking the largest reorganisation of Druze armed groups yet since the conflict began. On the administrative side, a "Supreme Legal Committee," composed of judges and lawyers, was tasked with managing the governorate.

54. The rift has affected the humanitarian situation (see Section VI below) and has had ongoing impact concerning the general socio-economic situation in the governorate, including most starkly in relation to the rehabilitation of thousands of burned and looted homes. It has also impacted the National Inquiry established by the Ministry of Justice to investigate the events in Suwayda (see Section VI, below),⁶⁷ which to date has not been able to enter the city of Suwayda

⁶³ <https://sana.sy/en/syria/2303648/>.

⁶⁴ This figure includes 1,148 human remains reported examined or collected by medical and humanitarian workers. While some remains may have been reported by two or several such entities, the Commission deems this to constitute the absolute minimum number of deaths confirmed as having occurred during the events. Many families reported burying loved ones directly, without the body having been examined or collected by medical workers or first responders, meaning the likely number is much higher, as reported. The number of 1,342 Druze fatalities was arrived at by adding the number of reported identified and examined human remains from the Druze community with the number of family-reported deaths and burials, de-duplicating records received. The number of at least 225 government force member fatalities was reported by the National Inquiry and the Ministry of Defence, alongside 516 wounded and 33 members reported still missing. The number of 70 Bedouin fatalities was reported by Bedouin community members, the majority of which the commission documented itself during its investigations. By subtracting this number, 70, from the overall number of 140 victims of tribes and Bedouins reported by the Suwayda National Inquiry, 70 additional reported deaths, presumed to be pertaining to non-Suwayda based members of tribes, were added to the estimated death toll. The total credible reported death toll based on available information is then 1,707.

⁶⁵ <https://sana.sy/en/syria/2278012/>

⁶⁶ Joint statement by PM Netanyahu and Defense Minister Israel Katz Prime Minister's Office

⁶⁷ Furthermore, the defence affairs department of the Syrian government also established a committee to verify the affiliation and background of individuals involved in the violence, see https://x.com/Sy_Defense/status/1947723568378482962?s=20 as well as <https://docs.un.org/en/S/PRST/2025/6>. Separately, the Ministry of Interior announced an inquiry into events at the national hospital, see <https://sana.sy/en/syria/2260425/>. There has been no update as of the drafting of this report concerning developments or outcomes.

due to distrust of the authorities in Damascus, announcing on 16 November that it was seeking an extension of its mandate.⁶⁸

55. Meanwhile, the situation of around 155,000 internally displaced persons⁶⁹ from all communities remains deeply challenging with many living in camps not equipped with the most basic needs for survival. Others have been housed in schools, thereby disrupting children's access to education and school facilities.⁷⁰ While most IDPs the Commission spoke to indicate a strong desire to return to their homes, both Druze and Bedouin communities remain fearful of another round of violence and do not feel safe to return to their villages which are currently under the control of government forces and Druze armed groups respectively.

56. To find a way out of the current impasse, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United States and the Kingdom of Jordan agreed on a roadmap for resolving the crisis in Suwayda and stabilizing southern Syria on 16 September (see Section VI, below).⁷¹ As of the writing of this report, implementation of the roadmap has been moving slowly. The governor of Suwayda has been working to restore basic services and rehabilitate damaged infrastructure while undertaking steps that could help pave the way for people to return to their homes.

57. Meanwhile, Suwayda remains tense and highly fragmented, with only a fragile calm in place. Local Druze factions, including the newly formed National Guard, maintain de facto control of central Suwayda, while government forces continue to hold several western and northern villages (see map Annex I). Most displaced Druze and Bedouin communities have not been able to return to their homes across the contact line because of the above protection concerns or because they have been prevented from returning due to restrictions by the government and the Suwayda National Guard. Cross-community relations remain strained after the violence. Sporadic clashes, road closures, and targeted attacks continue to disrupt daily life. The absence of a credible security or governance framework leaves the governorate vulnerable to renewed escalation.

58. Restoring trust between the people of Suwayda and the government, as well as between the different communities in Suwayda will be critical for any meaningful resolution to the current impasse. Toward those ends, ensuring accountability for serious violations of humanitarian law and international human rights law as well as uncovering the fate of the missing and releasing all those unlawfully deprived of their liberty will be essential for any reconciliation process.

59. Meanwhile, civic space inside Suwayda has notably shrunk with critics of the local authorities - whether military or civilians - finding themselves increasingly in the crosshairs of the local authorities. The Commission is currently investigating reports of torture and executions at the hands of the Suwayda National Guard, including the deaths of two Druze Sheikhs and a prominent poet with opposing views late November and early December after they were allegedly tortured in custody and had their moustaches shaved, as well as the reported continued looting of Bedouin homes.

IV. Human Rights and Humanitarian Law Violations and Abuses by Government forces and tribal fighters

60. Violations and abuses by the Syrian government forces and tribal fighters both associated with government forces or directly participating in hostilities occurred in Suwayda governorate in July and continuing into August - and prior to the eruption of armed conflict, also in Jaramana and Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya in April and May. This section starts with an overview of violations before examining patterns specific to the 14-16 July period when government forces were accompanied by local tribal fighters. It then examines the 17-19 July period where violations were committed by tribal fighters after the formal government withdraw.

⁶⁸ <https://sana.sy/en/syria/2278012/> <https://sana.sy/en/syria/2278012/>

⁶⁹ [ocha_flash_update_4_hostilities_in_as-sweida_27072025.pdf](https://ocha.flash.update_4_hostilities_in_as-sweida_27072025.pdf)

⁷⁰ <https://www.unicef.org/media/177651/file/Syrian-Arab-Republic-Humanitarian-SitRep-No.17,-November-2025.pdf.pdf>

⁷¹ <https://sana.sy/en/local/2267905/> and <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/586>. States and organizations welcoming the roadmap included the Gulf Cooperation Council, the League of Arab States, the EU, France, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Libya, Türkiye, and others.

61. Although the violations of international humanitarian and human rights law are organised under specific headings, victims and survivors were exposed to myriad cumulative and intersectional violations which are referenced throughout this and subsequent sections.

Extrajudicial killings

62. In relation to the July events, both Syrian government forces, including members of the Syrian Arab Army and the Internal Security forces as well as tribal fighters, engaged in widespread extrajudicial killings, predominantly of men and boys from the Druze community, including the elderly and disabled, but also women and girls, amounting to violence to life and murder in violation of international humanitarian law.⁷² Such violence took place amid the use of sectarian insults, indicating that they were systematically targeted on the basis of community affiliation. Most of the documented killings of civilians took place in the context of home raids, highlighting concerns about the breaches of fundamental international humanitarian law norms and implicate breaches of home, privacy and family life as a matter of human rights law in the northern and western villages of Suwayda governorate and in the city itself (Annex II). Noting that such actions also occurred when civilians were stopped in the street, whether on foot or in vehicles.⁷³

63. The killings took place between 14 and 19 July, with the largest number of documented killings taking place on 15 and 16 July, prior to the withdrawal of government forces. During the period of 14-16 July, government forces and tribal fighters were operating together and in close proximity as part of the same overall operation advancing into the governorate and all groups not affiliated to the Ministries of Defence and Interior were prohibited from entering Suwayda, according to government statements.⁷⁴ The acts of such tribal fighters are therefore attributable to the government during the 14-16 July period in Suwayda.

64. Extrajudicial executions and summary killings committed by government forces and accompanying tribal fighters during home raids during the 14-16 July period typically followed a gendered pattern where men and older boys were separated from women, girls, and younger boys. In most cases men were taken outside of the home or women were moved out of the guest house, or *madhafe*, typical in the region for hosting guests. After asking whether there were any weapons or valuables, robbing them, and insulting them on the basis of their religion, the men and boys were shot at close range, often repeatedly.⁷⁵ In some cases, the males and females were not separated and were killed in the same location together. In one documented case, a group of women and girls was forced to strip before they were shot and killed, implicating the violation of enforced nudity, a form of gender-based violence compounding the violation of the right to life.⁷⁶ All of the documented massacres took place against Druze civilians, underscoring the systematic manner in which the community was targeted for such violence.⁷⁷

65. Most of the killings employed small arms fire, though in at least two cases, the victims were killed with knives or swords.⁷⁸ In one highly publicised case, three young men were forced to jump from a balcony while being shot at and it was not clear if the shooting or the fall was

⁷² Article 3 Common to the Geneva Conventions of 1949. See also Article 6, ICCPR and United Nations Human Rights Committee, General Comment no. 36 on the right to life, CCPR/C/GC/36, 3 September 2019.

⁷³ See Article 17, ICCPR.

⁷⁴ See for instance: <https://x.com/AlekhbariahSY/status/1945058116044783663>

⁷⁵ See, ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law study, Rule 88 on non-discrimination. See also, ICCPR, Article 26. This pattern of killings would also fit the Commission's working definition of "massacres" set out in A/HRC/22/59, paragraph 42 where, in response to a mandate from the UN Human Rights Council to investigate all massacres and in the absence of an established definition, the Commission considered a massacre to be, "An intentional mass killing of civilians not directly participating in hostilities, or hors de combat fighters, by organized armed forces or groups in a single incident, in violation of international human rights or humanitarian law."

⁷⁶ See, ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law study, Rule 88 on non-discrimination. See also, ICCPR, Articles 6 and 26.

⁷⁷ Despite the presence of large communities from other religious backgrounds in the governorate, there were no reports of killings of groups of unarmed civilians committed against other communities by government forces and tribal fighters during the period covered in this report.

⁷⁸ This is separate from instances where bodies may have been mutilated after death, including through beheadings as described below.

their immediate cause of death.⁷⁹ In another high-profile case, eight men were forced to march to a nearby square, still in their pyjamas, and at least one barefoot, where they were lined up and shot at close range.

66. Killings that occurred when civilians encountered government forces and affiliated tribal fighters on the street took various forms. In some cases, civilians were stopped, taken out of their vehicles, with some summarily executed while others were allowed to leave or were detained. In other cases, civilians were shot inside their vehicles, sometimes after being stopped by Internal Security Forces and in other cases when attempting to flee hostilities. In other cases, civilians, including unarmed elderly men, were shot as they were walking on the street during lulls in shooting.

67. In several cases, government fighters holding unarmed civilians reported to their chain of command either verbally or through the radio asking for instructions, indicating they were operating under a functional and controlled chain of command. In other cases, the killings and other abuses in the presence of large numbers of government forces in public, or the involved forces were seen before or after killings coordinating with other units on the streets, indicating institutional awareness of the violence directed against civilians as it was taking place.

68. Though some neighbourhoods of Suwayda city witnessed fighting during this time, the victims of killings in the incidents documented by the Commission in the detailed findings section (see Annex II) were unarmed civilians and posed no immediate threat at the time they were killed or injured.

69. The Commission also documented killings of civilians, likely by government affiliated armed groups, including as a result of at least one house raid in relation to the events in Jaramana and Achrafiyeh and Sahnaya (see Annex II).

70. Killings also took place in both Suwayda city and in the western and northern villages outside the context of active hostilities after the announcement of the ceasefire by tribal fighters who entered the governorates between 17 and 19 July. During this period, tribal fighters engaged in home raids similar to those described above and as detailed in Annex II.

71. The Commission also documented a large number of cases where bodies of civilians, including elderly men and women and disabled adults, were found in their homes in the northern and western villages, with many having been burnt, in violation of the obligation to protect and respect the dead.⁸⁰ Although in such cases it could not ascertain the precise circumstances of death it is unlikely that in the case of elderly and disabled persons, such individuals were taking any part in the hostilities at the time they were killed.

Conduct of hostilities and civilian harm

72. Though the nature of the conflict and civilian accounts made it difficult to verify attacks in the conduct of hostilities to analyse their lawfulness individually, the commission documented the impact of indirect and direct fire in civilian areas which caused civilian casualties. In both the western villages and in Suwayda city, residents reported the impact of rockets, mortars, shelling, drone strikes, and heavy machine gun fire as government forces supported by tribal fighters approached on 14 and 15 July. Similar reports were received regarding the subsequent advance of tribal fighters on 18 and 19 July. The Commission could not determine the targets or context in which such weapons were used in most cases though the manner in which such weapons were deployed, including in densely populated areas of the city and some villages raise concerns regarding respect for the principles of distinction and precautions under international humanitarian law.

73. During site visits to locations, in particular the western and northern villages, including where no active fighting had been reported, the Commission found remnants of rocket propelled grenades and mortars of various calibres, and various types of grenades as well as bullet casings from light weapons up to heavy machine guns and anti-aircraft projectiles. Though the precise context could not be established for every location, the damage observed and the absence of

⁷⁹ The Syrian government, in its response of 17 March to the Commission's draft report, stated that at least one of the perpetrators was arrested in relation to this event. The Commission is seeking further clarification in this regard. See Section VI, below.

⁸⁰ For an overview of impacted rights, see Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Protection of the dead, A/HRC/56/56, 25 April 2024, paras 10-13. See: Annex II, Section D.

reported fighting in such locations as well as video evidence consistent with firing of explosive weapons at civilian buildings without indicia of ongoing hostilities indicates that civilian buildings were also directly targeted by government forces or tribal fighters, in violation of international humanitarian law.

74. Many interviewees reported that their homes in Suwayda city were impacted by shelling causing material damage, and in some cases injuring civilians, during government armed forces operations on 15-16 July. In one case, the Commission documented three impacts consistent with a 73mm smoothbore gun, likely mounted on armoured personnel carrier, consistent with weaponry used in the Syrian Arab Army, that fired into a row of residential apartments where residents reported no fighting at the time, indicating a direct attack on civilian objects in violation of international humanitarian law.⁸¹ Multiple homes and apartment were damaged, and residents reported that two civilians were killed, though the Commission could not confirm their deaths were caused by the shells.

75. Government armed forces also likely damaged the Suwayda National Hospital during the fighting, which should have benefited from specific protections under international humanitarian law.⁸² On 16 July, government forces conducted operations in the immediate vicinity and within the Suwayda National Hospital, which was hit by shelling. In the same context on the same day, a Syrian Arab Red Crescent warehouse was impacted by shelling, starting a fire that reportedly resulted in the destruction of 20 tons of humanitarian supplies. Though precise attribution could not be determined in these cases, given that the government advance was accompanied by shelling into the city and the limited organised resistance in the city it is more likely that the damage to these locations was caused by government forces than SMCAGs.

Desecration of the dead

76. The desecration of bodies, mostly of men, was another pattern observed where government forces and tribal fighters operated during the July events. All documented acts of desecration of the dead by government forces and tribal fighters were carried out against members of the Druze community. Such human rights violations constitute violations of the non-derogable rights to life and to freedom of religion and belief, as well as the right to family life under international human rights law as well as violations of the prohibition of outrages on personal dignity under international humanitarian law.⁸³ This mostly took the form of burning bodies after killing. In many instances, it was not possible to determine if a person burned to death, or if their body was burned after killing, though in some cases the Commission was able to determine that bodies were deliberately set on fire after death. Though it could not independently verify such information, it received credible reports that bodies in the western and northern villages were piled up and set on fire in some locations. As noted, the Commission also documented cases of beheadings of bodies which constitutes a distinct outrage on personal dignity, though in only one case could it determine that the individual's head was severed after death as opposed to beheading as the cause of death. In many cases, bodies were recovered weeks or months after death in the affected villages, sometimes missing body parts though the exact reason could not be determined based on the information available.

77. In numerous instances, the Commission documented government forces and tribal fighters posting pictures of the bodies of dead Druze online, with such forces smiling and celebrating the killings, and in some cases hitting, kicking or stepping on bodies in the images posted. Further, in at least one case, the body of a Druze man was deliberate run over repeatedly by a truck after he was killed.⁸⁴ Other cases of such conduct were reported.

Detention and abductions

78. The Commission documented the abduction, arbitrary arrest and detention of civilians by Internal Security Forces as well as by tribal fighters, including some affiliated with government armed forces, during the July events in Suwayda.

⁸¹ See ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study, Rules 1, 7, 15, and 22.

⁸² See ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study, Rule 28.

⁸³ See Article 3 Common to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 as well as Articles 4, 6, 17 and 18 of the ICCPR.

⁸⁴ Video on file with the Commission.

79. Initial detention or deprivations of liberty of civilians occurred during home raids as well as when stopped by government or tribal fighters when moving on the streets. As was the case for killings, the vast majority of those detained or abducted were adult men indicating gendered targeting of men for detention purposes, including the elderly, though women, boys and girls were also abducted or detained. Nearly all abductions and detentions of Druze civilians were accompanied by insults based on religious beliefs, which points to the intersection of discriminatory intent and purpose in detention practices and rendering such acts arbitrary deprivations of liberty in violation of international humanitarian law.⁸⁵

80. In many cases, once someone was detained or went missing, their families received calls from their mobile phones seeking ransoms. For those held by tribal fighters and not yet released, family members were reportedly wary of publicly acknowledging such detention for fear of jeopardizing negotiations or payments for their release.

81. For those detained by government forces, many passed through Internal Security Forces facilities in Dar'a, including the former Political Security Directorate detention facility, before being transferred to Adra Central Prison in Rural Damascus. In some cases where initial abductions were carried out by tribal fighters, abductees were subsequently transferred to be detained in Internal Security Forces' custody, indicative of significant cooperation between tribal fighters and State security forces after the ceasefire.

82. Many detentions were relatively short in duration, with individuals being released after a few hours or a few days, or subject to detainee swaps akin to the pattern of mutual abductions and releases common in intercommunal disputes in Suwayda, indicating that some abductions also may have amounted to hostage taking in violation of international humanitarian law.⁸⁶ Other detentions were much longer, with 110 men and boys reported detained in Suwayda during this period held in Adra central prison in Rural Damascus as of September, and up to 70 by mid-December. According to the National Inquiry Committee, four Druze men remained held in Adra Central Prison facing domestic criminal charges at the time of writing, awaiting trial.⁸⁷

83. Many adult Druze men were subject to actions that constituted at a minimum cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and which in specific cases may reach the threshold for torture as a matter of international law.⁸⁸ These actions notably occurred during custodial situations outside places of detention. Such treatment included being stuck with rifle butts and insulted on the basis of their religion during their initial capture and transfer out of the governorate. Some had their moustaches or beards forcibly shaven during their initial capture. Yet others were shot or otherwise injured during their capture and were transferred to hospitals outside the governorate where they were detained until medically stabilized and transferred to another facility.

84. The Commission further documented severe beating accompanied by insults on the basis of religion that also implicates the standard for torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in the former Political Security Directorate branch detention facility, the former Military Intelligence branch detention facility, and former Military Police facilities in Dar'a, each being operated by Internal Security Forces. Such violence included beatings with pipes and fists, whipping with cords, accompanied by insults based on their religion. In one case, a man who had been taken into custody in good health and transferred to an Internal Security Forces facility in Izraa died in custody, reportedly after other detainees witnessed his severe beating. An eyewitness reported that some Internal Security Forces members from Dar'a sought to protect detainees from abuses by other Internal Security Forces members and tribal or Bedouin fighters.

85. Conditions in detention were also of concern implicating the prohibition on cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment under international law. Conditions of confinement were reported to be overcrowded, in particular in facilities in Dar'a, with men, including the elderly, and boys held together. In some cases, detainees were able to make phone calls to family, though most were not able to contact family members or lawyers with any regularity until they were transferred to Adra Central Prison days or weeks after this initial detention, raises concern of enforced disappearances in custody. Once in Adra Central Prison former detainees generally reported better conditions, though they also recalled the presence of boys, the elderly, and the

⁸⁵ See ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study, Rule 99.

⁸⁶ See ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study, Rule 96.

⁸⁷ See government reply to COI Note Verbale, Annex IV.

⁸⁸ See Article 3 Common to the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

disabled among the detainees held through September.⁸⁹ The Commission sought and was granted access to Adra Central Prison.

86. Given the fluidity of detentions, releases, exchanges, and the general chaos of the conflict, the total number of people detained by government forces and deprived of liberty by tribal fighters cannot be absolutely determined with precision. While the vast majority of those known to be detained during the events have been released, at least 100 Druze individuals reportedly remain missing and may continue to be held by tribal fighters or criminal networks.

87. The Commission also documented two cases of abduction by other local pro-government armed groups⁹⁰ during the events in Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya, though in both cases the victims' bodies were located following day, implicating summary or arbitrary execution.

88. Abductions also carried a gender-based violence dimension. In particular, targeted abduction of women, including elderly women, and girls was documented, mainly in the context of the tribal mobilization on 18 and 19 July by a diversity of tribal fighters with often unclear affiliation. Tribal fighters abducted women along with their children, including both girls and boys, including after having killed their adult male relatives. In other cases, women who were at home alone were forcibly taken at gunpoint. Some were released on the same day they were taken, while others were held as hostages in violation of international humanitarian law in order to be exchanged for detainees held by SMCAGs. Others were released during operations conducted by Internal Security Forces. Most were taken to Dar'a and Rural Damascus though in at least one case a group of women abductees was transported to Hama before negotiations for their release succeeded. This detention also amounted to hostage taking in violation of international humanitarian law. The Commission notes that numerous lists of women and girls who were reportedly abducted circulated in the aftermath of the July events. The Commission reviewed these lists and sought to clarify the circumstances of the missing women. Many were located safely after having lost communication with their families shortly after the events while some were released over the following weeks and months. Yet others were found dead after their bodies had been identified while at least three Druze women reportedly remain unaccounted for at the time of writing.

Rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence

89. The targeting and impact of the violence by government forces and tribal fighters documented in this report were deeply gendered, with men and boys most often targeted for killings, beatings, and other forms of physical violence. Women and girls were also killed and beaten, as stated above and described in greater detail in the detailing factual findings below. Nearly all sexual violence was documented against women, though credible reports of sexual violence against men remain under investigation.

90. The Commission documented one case of a girl in the context of the July events who was raped and subjected to other sexual violence in the presence of her mother by three-armed men on 16 July in Suwayda city, including two who appeared to be foreigners and a third spoke with a Syrian accent implicating both non-derogable human rights protections and violations of core international humanitarian law provisions. The rape occurred in the context of a house raid while government forces were deployed in the area and was brought to an end after an Internal Security Forces officer entered and order the men to stop. The Commission received additional reports of rapes, including credible reports of women seeking post-rape care from medical professionals, and these allegations remain under investigation.

91. In addition, the Commission documented forced nudity in Suwayda city on 16 July in one case where five women and two girls were forced to strip naked before being shot at close range by members of government armed forces, with only one woman surviving. The case constitutes an outrage on personal dignity and a violation of the prohibition on inhuman and degrading treatment (see Annex II, section D, below). Furthermore, on 15-17 July women in Suwayda city were subjected to invasive searches which constitute outrages on personal dignity and

⁸⁹ See ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study, Rule 120. See also, United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (The Beijing Rules), General Assembly A/RES/40/33 (29 November 1985), rule 13.4. See also, Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles) (2007).

⁹⁰ See Annex II, section A.

violations of the prohibition on inhuman and degrading treatment by armed men, including touching breasts and genitals implicating prohibitions on sexual and gender-based violence. Claims that such violations were justified by a search for valuables categorically does not undo the violations of human dignity engaged by such actions.

92. In other cases, documented both in July in Suwayda in relation to government forces and tribal fighters and in May in Achrafiyeh-Sahmaya in relation to local non-state armed groups, fighters threatened women with sexual violence, either by stating that they should take the women as war booty or saying that they would return for them. Such treatment also constitutes outrages on personal dignity and may violate the prohibition on the right to bodily integrity and security of person. In some cases, this was in the context of removing male family members from the home and killing them shortly thereafter, underscoring the cumulative nature of the violations and abuses experienced by the families concerned.

93. The Commission also documented a case of an adult woman raped by an armed man in the presence of her child after armed men entered her home in Sura al Kabira in the beginning of May after Internal Security Forces and tribal fighters established control over the area.

94. Due to the particular trauma inherent in sexual violence, as well as the fear of stigmatization or intracommunity violence stemming from conservative attitudes toward notions of honour, the full extent of rape and other forms of sexual violence may only be clarified after significantly more time has elapsed from the events, if at all.

Other violence against civilians

95. As illustrated by the patterns above, civilians in Suwayda were subjected to a range of other forms of violence which constitute violations of fundamental rights including the freedom from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, as well as torture, the right to respect for home, privacy, and family as well as acts that amount to violence to life, including murder and outrages on personal dignity in violation of international humanitarian law.⁹¹ Examples of these violations include beatings during home raids, threats including threats of physical violence including threats of sexual violence, intimidation, and shooting near people and inside of homes. This violence was directed at men, women, girls and boys, who were often grouped together during violence home entries or when moving from one location to another when they encounter government forces or tribal fighters. The repeated raids on homes were nearly all characterized by violence and threats, despite the diversity of ways where the armed actors engaged with the civilians, as noted elsewhere in this report.

96. One particular aspect of the widespread violence in Suwayda which occurred repeatedly during and after government forces operations and which constitutes both torture and outrages upon personal dignity as a matter of international law was the shaving and cutting of moustaches and beards of Druze men, in particular older men with the status of Sheikh.⁹² During the tribal mobilization on 17 July onwards, videos of men claiming to be on route to Suwayda brandishing scissors or shavers appeared as the events were unfolding. Likewise, many of the perpetrators filmed themselves shaving the moustaches of Druze men while surrounded by other armed men, typically a mixed group of individuals in military and civilian attire but no visible insignia. In some cases, the victims were killed afterward, including two cases where the individuals were beheaded, although it is unknown whether they were dead or alive when their heads were cut off. We highlight the compression of human rights and humanitarian law violations in single incidents, in which intersectional violations were experienced by the victims.

Looting, burning and destruction of civilian objects

97. Across the northern and western villages of Suwayda that came under control of government forces or tribal fighters during the events in July, nearly every single home and business in majority Druze villages, at least 35 in total, was looted and deliberately burned. The destruction of civilian objects is prohibited by international humanitarian law and is also a violation of international human rights law obligations to respect home, privacy, and family.⁹³

⁹¹ ICCPR Article 6, 7, 17 and Article 3 Common to the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

⁹² As mentioned in paragraph 59, above, such shaving also reportedly occurred in late November 2025 in the context of intra-Druze violence.

⁹³ See ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study Rules 7-10 and 50 and ICCPR Article 17.

The few homes that were not burned in those locations were also looted by government forces and tribal fighters. Pillage is a violation of international humanitarian law.⁹⁴ Nearly all Druze religious sites in those villages, including Majlis and Maqams were looted, burnt, and vandalized.⁹⁵ Religious buildings are subject to special protection during armed conflict, and attacks on such locations are prohibited by international humanitarian law.⁹⁶ At least four Christian churches in villages with large Druze populations were also looted and vandalized, with three of those also burnt. In Suwayda city, many homes and businesses were also set on fire, and government forces and tribal fighters also robbed residents of their belongings during homes raids.

98. Burning and looting of homes in the western villages in Suwayda started with isolated cases in the evening of 13 July and increased on 14 and 16 July. However, by 17 July, most homes and buildings had not yet been burnt though many had already been looted, according to residents. Instead, it was during that tribal mobilization on 18 July onwards that nearly every home in those 35 villages was systematically looted and deliberately burned.⁹⁷ Though most of the looting and burning occurred between 18 and 19 July, additional homes and buildings were set on fire through July and August. Isolated homes were also burned in Sura al Kabira during the events at the end of April and beginning of May.

99. During that looting of both homes and businesses prior to the burning, tribal fighters used vans and trucks loading furniture, appliances, agricultural produce and other items to haul away. In some cases, people arrived with tools and equipment to remove doors, windows and metals from homes, including electrical wiring. Undesirable items were left behind to be burned along with the homes. Even isolated homes and buildings were subjected to burning. Cars, motorcycles, and tractors were also taken, though many that were left behind were also burned. With few exceptions, vehicles carrying such stolen goods out of Suwayda did not seem to be stopped nor impeded by government forces as they crossed out of the governorate.

100. Electricity transformers and power lines were also cut in the western and northern villages, with damage to both visible during the commission's visits to the northern and western villages and damage that rendered water pumping stations was reported. Though the precise circumstances remain under investigation, the Commission reiterates that attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population is prohibited by international humanitarian law.⁹⁸

V. Humanitarian Law Violations by Druze Armed Groups

101. Violations of international humanitarian law were committed by the SMCAGs in Suwayda governorate in July and continuing into August in the context of a non-international armed conflict. The treatment of civilians by some members of SMCAGs was respectful in their interactions. In the conduct outlined below, however, the violent acts documented were accompanied by discriminatory insults and rhetoric based on the perceived or actual religious beliefs and cultural and community affiliation.

Extrajudicial killings

102. Members of SMCAGs, carried out killings of predominantly men and boys from the Bedouin community, but also women and girls – who were civilians clearly not taking part in hostilities. These killings targeted Bedouin civilians based on their community affiliation in the context of attacks on Bedouin communities. Documented killings that amount to violations of

⁹⁴ See ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study Rule 50.

⁹⁵ A Majlis is a Druze house of worship, performing a similar function to a mosque while a Maqam is also a place of worship with a shrine located inside dedicated to the honour and memory of Druze Sheikhs.

⁹⁶ ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study, Rules 38 and 40.

⁹⁷ The Commission sought independent forensic advice and examinations in the areas of fire investigation, explosives and explosions, weapons and ammunition, forensic pathology and forensic anthropology, to examine the nature and origin of the widespread fire damage, including the alleged use of C4 and white phosphorus. The examined information was not informative on the use of C4 and white phosphorus. The Commission noted the abundance of explosive projectile remnants and mazut (kerosine) containers located in different locations where it observed severe fire damage as possible ignition materials, though it cannot rule out the use of other means and methods.

⁹⁸ See ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study, Rule 54.

the prohibition of violence to life and in particular murder under international humanitarian law occurred in incidents in central Suwayda after Bedouin residents fled Maqwas and Sahwet Balata where unarmed civilian men and in the latter case, also boys, were shot and killed by SMCAG members on 15 and 16 July. Bedouin civilians, including girls, boys, women and men, including elderly, were also shot and killed while fleeing attacks on foot, including in Shahba, in Um Elzaytun and in southern villages on 17 July. In one such case, as SMCAGs ordered the civilian population of the Bedouin neighbourhood of Shahba to leave their homes, a fleeing family of seven including two girls and two boys, three women, including one elderly, and one man were shot at close range by a group of SMCAGs, killing all but one teenage girl, who was severely injured.

Conduct of hostilities and civilian harm

103. Most documented deaths and injuries of Bedouin civilians took place in the context of the conduct of hostilities situations, though in many cases attacks appeared to be deliberately directed at civilian areas rather than the result of incidental harm. Such acts constitute direct attacks on civilians in violation of international humanitarian law and by default violate the principle of distinction. These included the attacks on Bedouin civilians in Shahba village north of Suwayda city on 17 July using truck mounted 23 mm guns and other light and medium weapons that killed and injured civilians. Similarly, in Mansoura to the west, Sahwet Balata to the south, Um Elzaytun and other locations, civilians—including very young children clearly visible as such — were killed or injured by shooting as they fled SMCAGs attacks on foot. In some of those cases, it was not clear if they were the intended targets as government forces were in the area at the time. During the fighting in Maqwas neighbourhood in the eastern part of the city, civilians were injured or killed in their homes as they sheltered from heavy calibre weapon fire, raising concerns regarding respect for the principle of distinction and precautions in attacks under international humanitarian law.

Desecration of the dead

104. The Commission also documented the desecration of bodies of Bedouins who had been killed by SMCAGs, amounting to violations of the prohibition of outrages upon personal dignity in violation of international humanitarian law.⁹⁹ This included the hanging of the bodies of two men from entry gate at the western entrance of Janeina village east of Suwayda, for days. At least one SMCAG fighter posted pictures of himself with the bodies online. In addition, some bodies that were left on the streets of Suwayda of government forces and tribal fighters were reportedly set on fire.

Detention and abductions

105. The Commission documented the mass arbitrary detention of Bedouin civilians, in particular in Shahba and Um Elzaytun from 17 July onward. In both cases, there was no indication that such detentions were based on imperative security reasons, nor were there any other lawful grounds for such detention, rendering them arbitrary under international humanitarian law.¹⁰⁰ In Shahba, when SMCAGs forced the residents from the Bedouin neighbourhood to flee their homes, they also rounded up those who did not escape and transferred them to the Shahba mosque and to the homes of Druze individuals linked to or leading armed groups implicating arbitrary detention undertaken in private or religious property. Eventually people held in homes or sheltered by neighbours were transferred to the mosque as well, where they totalled approximately 1,200 men, women, boys, and girls, including the elderly and the disabled. Most had their phones and valuables confiscated and all were kept under armed guard. Witnesses described shooting outside the mosque, being threatened with death, and receiving poor quality food and unpotable drinking water, causing illness particularly among children. The conditions of detention were such that they amount to violations of the prohibition of cruel treatment in violation of international humanitarian law.¹⁰¹ They were held there for three days before being transferred at night to a technical school where they were held for two more days

⁹⁹ Article 3 Common to the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

¹⁰⁰ See ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study Rule 99.

¹⁰¹ Article 3 Common to the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

before they were evacuated by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to Dar'a. In Um Elzaytun village to the north of Suwayda, Bedouin residents were held by SMCAGs in a kindergarten for three days, where guards told them they would be executed, and looted valuables from the captives. As fighting neared the area on 19 July, the guard abandoned the captives, at which time women, children and men fleeing on foot and clearly civilians were shot at, with some being killed and injured (see also above under conduct of hostilities).

106. Several Bedouin men were also arbitrarily deprived of liberty by SMCAGs including within the former government General Intelligence Branch in Suwayda city, where captives were treated in a manner that implicates violations on the prohibition against torture and treatment in violation of international humanitarian law, including being handcuffed, insulted, interrogated, and beaten with sticks and whips. In some cases, the detentions amount to acts tantamount to enforced disappearances, as individuals were last seen being taken away by Druze fighters, and their whereabouts remain unknown, as was the case of a young man injured in the legs in Maqwas on 13 July. His family reported receiving messages periodically for months afterward claiming he is alive and being tortured. His fate remains unknown.

107. In other cases, SMCAGs detained members of government forces and tribal fighters and engaged in treatment that violated the prohibition of outrages upon personal dignity under international humanitarian law including beating and forcibly shaving some during their capture as recorded and disseminated on social media.¹⁰² At least 30 were still being held by the Suwayda National Guard as of the drafting of this report. The Commission sought but was not yet granted access to visit these detainees during its visits to Suwayda.

108. Abductions also affected Bedouin women in Suwayda. The Commission documented the abduction of four women and three girls from Bedouin villages by SMCAG. The abductions were all reported to have occurred during the armed conflict in July, with three Bedouin women and one girl reportedly held by SMCAGs at the time of writing of the report.

Forced displacement

109. Bedouins from villages to the south and west of Suwayda City as well as from northern villages like Um Elzaytun described having to flee their homes and neighbourhoods in the midst of hostilities or threats thereof, without being able to bring any belongings but the clothes they were wearing. While many fled on foot as described above, others fled in their own private vehicles or were evacuated in convoys. Others were subject to forced displacement in violation of international humanitarian law, as neither the protection of the civilians displaced, nor imperative military reasons justified the displacement.¹⁰³ Such was the case for the more than 1,200 Bedouins held in the Shahba Mosque by SMCAGs, the Bedouin residents who remained from Kafr village in the south, and Bedouins elsewhere who were transported out of Suwayda governorate by humanitarian groups following negotiations between SMCAGs and government forces. According to the Bedouin residents, they were not given a choice as to whether to leave, remain in their homes, or move to a different location within the governorate. In the case of the Bedouins of Shahba, they were loaded onto buses after their detention and transported to Dar'a governorate. In the case of Kafr, there was an organized convoy to escort Bedouin civilians out of their village, taking only what they could transport with them. In the case of Um Elzaytun village, residents were rounded up and arbitrarily deprived of liberty before fleeing during hostilities. The end result was the removal of nearly the entire Bedouin population from Suwayda city and villages immediately to the north, south, and west.¹⁰⁴ This constituted mass, forced displacement of a civilian population by SMCAGs, which may amount to a war crime.

¹⁰² Article 3 Common to the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

¹⁰³ See ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study, Rule 129.

¹⁰⁴ In response to questions from the Commission, a representative of the Suwayda authorities stated in an email on 1 February 2026 that the evacuations were conducted at the request of the Bedouin community and in order to protect them from popular reprisals and that both the government and other countries may have been involved in supporting their evacuation. They also stated that the Bedouin community is welcome to return when conditions allow.

Sexual and gender-based violence

110. The harms suffered by the Bedouin community were deeply gendered, with men and boys predominantly among those targeted for killing, acts of public humiliation including the shaving of beards and subject to severe beatings in detention. Though the Commission received allegations of sexual violence against Bedouin women and girls, it was unable to confirm such allegations. Due to the particular trauma inherent in sexual violence, as well as the fear of stigmatization or intracommunity violence stemming from conservative attitudes toward notions of honour, the full extent of rape and other forms of sexual violence may only be clarified after significantly more time has elapsed from the events, if at all. Investigations are ongoing.

Looting and destruction of civilian objects

111. Following the forced or non-consenting displacement of Bedouins from their homes in Maqwas neighbourhood, Shahba town, Sahwet Balata village, Ora village, and elsewhere, their homes and business were looted, as were their livestock and vehicles left behind. Such pillage amounts to a violation of international humanitarian law.¹⁰⁵ In some cases, their homes were deliberately burnt or destroyed, but in most cases, they have been and remain occupied by members of SMCAGs, or civilians displaced into areas controlled by such groups, implicating ongoing and unresolved violations of international humanitarian law.

112. Cultural and religious property is specially protected under international humanitarian law, and attacks on such locations are prohibited.¹⁰⁶ Four mosques, three in Suwayda city and the Shahba mosque in Shahba were also targeted during and after the events, with the minarets of the Great Mosque and the Haroobi mosques in Suwayda city being shot at by SMCAGs, and the Haroobi mosque being hit by explosive weapons on 17 July at which time there was no fighting in the city. The Maqwas mosque was also impacted by bullets, but the Commission could not determine whether it had been hit incidentally during hostilities or deliberately targeted. All four of the mosques were vandalized to different degrees and as noted above, the Shahba Mosque was used as an informal detention centre for more than one thousand people, which may also violate international humanitarian law prohibitions on using religious buildings for military purposes outside of imperative military necessity.¹⁰⁷

VI. Continuing Challenges to the Enjoyment of Fundamental Human Rights and Protections Afforded by IHL

113. The broader impact of the conflict on the enjoyment of human rights for all affected communities due to the July events has been dire. In addition to the violations of international humanitarian and international human rights law that entailed unlawful killings and treatment and other events, there are in parallel continuing violations of human rights stemming from the conflict. These relate to the fate of the missing and disappeared, restrictions on humanitarian access and freedom of movement, barriers to educational access, the role of misinformation and hate speech in facilitating violations, and the government response that has not yet produced tangible progress on accountability. Added to this are other barriers to respect for housing, land and property rights, stemming from the widespread looting and burning of homes and usurpation of property.¹⁰⁸ All of these issues present ongoing implications for the respect for human rights and the fulfilment of obligations under international humanitarian law and have overlapping implications at both the individual and communal level that impair respect for each impacted person's human rights, and will only serve to deepen grievances that may perpetuate conflict if left unaddressed.

¹⁰⁵ See ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study, Rule 52.

¹⁰⁶ See ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study, Rules 38 and 40.

¹⁰⁷ See ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study, Rule 39.

¹⁰⁸ See Annex II, section I, below.

Missing persons and challenges with respect to the identification of human remains

114. The scale of the violence in July in Suwayda meant that the existing systems for receiving and identifying bodies, issuing death certificates and arranging dignified burials quickly became overwhelmed.

115. Hospitals in both Suwayda and Dar'a governorates received hundreds of bodies, brought there by both civilians and first responders, within a short period of time. This was in addition to a massive number of injured persons seeking treatment, taking priority in the triage over those who had already died.

116. With insufficient space in refrigerated morgues, the smell became unbearable. Many of the bodies were badly burnt, impeding rapid identification.¹⁰⁹ Other bodies had been left in the open and likely scavenged by wild animals before being found, resulting in scattered remains. Hospital staff and first responders were forced to allow the burial of bodies before they could be identified; while safeguarding records and images of where the body was found and when, and of remaining clothing or jewellery, body marks or tattoos where available, to aid subsequent identification.

117. On visits to affected villages, the Commission observed unexploded ordinance and badly burned and potentially structurally unsound buildings, leaving open the possibility that locations with such features could not yet be safely thoroughly searched for human remains. Bodies were still being discovered in villages in rural Suwayda as late as October. Some bodies had been hidden, perhaps in an effort to conceal evidence.

118. Identification of remains in the wake of such a traumatic mass casualty situation, in particular where many bodies were badly burnt and some missing parts, at times may have been incomplete or incorrect.¹¹⁰ One interviewee recounted her father's death in a hospital outside of Suwayda after he had been shot in one of the western villages. After fleeing the governorate, they requested his body from the hospital, but they initially received the wrong body. They buried that body and subsequently received their father's body, some 20 days later, and subsequently buried the correct body. Such misidentification will necessarily complicate efforts to return remains to the correct families. Misidentification adds to the trauma and harm experienced by the victims and leads to multiple and layered human rights violations that follow from the first violation, here death during hostilities.

119. Further, the division of the governorate into one area controlled by Druze leaders and one controlled by the government (see map Annex I), and the related political tensions and impediments on movement by SMCAGs has since made it difficult for relatives with missing loved ones residing in one area to gain access to records held by entities on the other side of the contact line, thereby limiting their right of access to remedy under international human rights law.¹¹¹

120. In combination with the above-mentioned possibility that some abductees and detainees are still held incommunicado which constitutes an ongoing and sustained human rights violation, many families have now been suffering for over eight months, not knowing whether their loved ones are alive or dead.¹¹²

121. Further efforts to consolidate all existing records on body retrieval on both sides of the contact line and to create a clear and accessible pathway for families with missing loved ones to

¹⁰⁹ This was often the case for many bodies found in Druze and mixed villages in western and northern Suwayda that had been destroyed by arson (see Annex II, section I), but also for bodies found in other locations affected by hostilities including Israeli airstrikes.

¹¹⁰ For an overview of impacted rights, see Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Protection of the dead, A/HRC/56/56, 25 April 2024, paras 10-13.

¹¹¹ Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, General Assembly resolution 60/147 (2005).

¹¹² Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 36 (2018), para. 58.

access such data are urgently needed, consistent with the rights of victims to a remedy under international human rights law.¹¹³

122. The political and territorial division also caused additional challenges for victims' families and may constitute free-standing human rights violations in their own right.¹¹⁴ For instance, Suwayda city residents could only obtain death certificates prepared by the Suwayda National Hospital, or file reports to local police authorities, with related death notifications also prepared by the local authorities – running the risk that their validity for insertion into the central civil registry will not be recognized, leaving families in a potential legal limbo, and absent a remedy and reparation for the death of a family member.¹¹⁵ Investigations remain ongoing.

123. The largest number of bodies were received by the National hospital of Suwayda, where more than 800 bodies were reportedly transported by family members, residents or aid workers. Hundreds of additional deaths were recorded by the hospital based solely on families' statements.¹¹⁶ In many cases, bodies that could not be handed over to the family, either because they were unidentified or because families were located across the control line, were buried in a mass grave in Raha. Mass burials raise serious concerns regarding respect for the international humanitarian law principles of respect for the dead and the requirement to account for the dead resulting from hostilities. Similarly, bodies received in Damascus or Dar'a that could not be handed over to family members inside Suwayda were buried without the family present, including in Najha, although in many cases family members were subsequently informed by the Ministry of Health-linked Identification Center, either directly or indirectly by family members through its Internet page dedicated to the identification of unknown bodies, sometimes through the clothes of the deceased. As indicated below, Annex II, section D, many families were forced to resort to bury their loved ones in their own gardens or yards, which constituted a profound dignity violation, due to both the security situation at the time of killings as well as the overwhelming of the usual systems, exacerbated by the above-mentioned political divisions.

124. Several hundreds of people were initially reported missing during and in the immediate aftermath of the escalation engaging international legal obligations for both state and non-state actors in respect of *inter alia* the respect for the right to life, and the prohibition against enforced disappearances.¹¹⁷ The connectivity and communication (including internet) shut down from 14 July onward impeded communication between family members and with aid and medical workers in different locations within the governorate during the height of the hostilities and violence.¹¹⁸ It was only after the withdrawal of forces that people, as they ventured out from where they had been sheltering, discovered bodies scattered in streets and homes, including family members they had not been able to reach for days. Similarly, only after communications and electricity were restored, could missing family members in other locations be contacted. In some cases, humanitarian actors located survivors without communication possibilities in remote locations even several weeks after the events. In addition, some of the initial missing persons reports were related to people who were later located in government or armed groups' custody, of whom many were subsequently released or at least acknowledged as detained there. However, we underscore here the continuity of violations as others are reportedly still held by unknown fighters or criminals, with some families contacted via confiscated mobile phones to request ransom money, yet without providing proof of life, leaving families in limbo and lacking meaningful access to a remedy.

125. While several hundreds of civilians were reported missing by 20 July, at the time of writing ongoing cumulative human rights violations continue, with at least 155 are reported as

¹¹³ The Commission understands such records were prepared by a variety of actors; including hospital medical professionals in Suwayda, Dar'a, Rural Damascus and Damascus governorates to where bodies were brought; as well as the Ministry for Emergencies and humanitarian groups supporting civilians.

¹¹⁴ UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), CCPR General Comment No. 18: Non-discrimination, 10 November 1989, para. 10.

¹¹⁵ Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, General Assembly resolution 60/147 (2005).

¹¹⁶ See Section III, above.

¹¹⁷ ICCPR Article 6 and ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study, Rule 98.

¹¹⁸ Such disruption may implicate violations of the principle of distinction under international humanitarian law. See, ICRC Paper on Cyber Operations During Armed Conflict, available at: https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/war-and-law/03_distinction-0.pdf

still missing including at least 100 from the Druze community and 25 members of the Bedouin community, and 30 from among government forces after the 19 July cease-fire.

Humanitarian access and freedom of movement

126. Inside Suwayda city, the hospital was overwhelmed with bodies and the injured while the population continued to locate bodies and survey the damage. Humanitarian needs were acute during that period, with shortages of food, water, medical supplies, and fuel. International humanitarian law requires that the means essential to the survival of the civilian population be maintained during hostilities. Parties to the conflict have an obligation to ensure that the denial of such essential supplies do not function as a form of reprisal for the civilian population during the course of hostilities. Electricity lines had been cut in many locations and the water supply infrastructure, dependent on wells located in areas under government control, had been damaged or destroyed. Water is essential for the survival of the civilian population, and only overwhelming military necessity may justify incidental harm to it during hostilities, a circumstance not demonstrated in the situation assessed here. The circumstances concerning damage to such infrastructure remain under investigation.¹¹⁹

127. Despite these needs, humanitarian aid was delayed by political haggling, a rationale which does not justify the denial of essential humanitarian supplies to the civilian population. A government convoy, including the Ministers of Health and Social Affairs, was denied entry to the city on 20 July, with Suwayda-based authorities insisting on only SARC or international aid access.¹²⁰ On 20, 23 and 28 July, the first SARC-led convoys entered the area,¹²¹ carrying also supplies from the UN,¹²² while the first UN-led 40-truck convoy was only authorized on 29 July and entered on 31 July, while flareups and clashes continued along the lines of control.¹²³ Since then, humanitarian access gradually increased and as of September it had become routine. Despite the increased humanitarian access, accusations of aid delays and diversion remained, with reports that food and fuel in particular were being diverted by the Suwayda National Guard to armed groups. Any such diversion of aid would amount to an arbitrary impediment to the delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians in need, in violation of international humanitarian law.¹²⁴

128. During those initial days, commercial movement of goods also ground to a halt due to the security situation, as well as some restrictions placed by the government. It also gradually resumed, though initially subject to the ability to pay bribes or protection money to facilitate entry. On successive visits to the governorate, the Commission observed a slow but steady increase in commercial traffic on the highway, indicating that despite security obstacles trade was increasing. At the same time, due to the isolation of Druze controlled areas, there were also concerns regarding diminishing liquidity as economic activity was limited and the Suwayda central bank remained cut-off from the national central bank. In tandem, in both government and Druze controlled areas, residents complained that state salaries and pension payment had ceased, impacting vulnerable older populations in particular. Salaries resumed as of at least November 2025. However communities reported continuing challenges to access pensions.

129. While commercial traffic and humanitarian aid gradually increased, and state pension and salary payments resumed, the movement of people across the contact line remained severed curtailed as of the preparation of this report, implicating limitations in the right of free movement of persons under international human rights law. This is due to the overall security situation,

¹¹⁹ The Commission notes that on 20 July, the Syrian authorities stated that restrictions to communications were caused by technical issues and worsened by restrictions imposed by outlaw groups, while restrictions to electricity and water resulted of sabotage by outlaw groups or Israeli attacks. On 25 July, the government authority for electricity indicated that repair teams were active to restore access to water and electricity. See for instance:

<https://www.facebook.com/SyrMOFe/posts/pfbid0rkACtCNEtffQXFE1obrFyEdkwnDHqmXt8tGHAp79qX8X373EjB1dtz6MNroNAGokl>

<https://www.facebook.com/SyMOCait/posts/pfbid023XCig4iRwtWbCpWYu7PSv3e39RedMsFTWJLHy6kXjSmucMhXUcw4NgWh3WK9YXMUI>

<https://www.facebook.com/SyrMOFe/posts/pfbid038KUAbEt21DHUZyymBe43eniYLDzeQY6R7FUfYcmSaz9DPg7zFz2bBvVxJ8SeYF8zl>

¹²⁰ <https://sana.sy/en/syria/2261820/https://sana.sy/en/syria/2261820/>

¹²¹ <https://x.com/SYRedCrescent/status/1946862818164081106?s=20>

¹²² <https://www.unocha.org/news/ocha-urges-security-council-protect-civilians-and-sustain-support-syria>

¹²³ <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-flash-update-no-5-escalation-hostilities-sweida-governorate-31-july-2025> (having received approval to enter on 29 July).

¹²⁴ See ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study, Rule 55.

which remains extremely tense, in conjunction with the fear of populations, Druze, Bedouin, and other communities, to return to their places of origin following the violent events. Members from all communities reported receiving threatening messages by phone, messaging services and social media, often from the mobile phone numbers of killed or missing relatives, stating that they can never return to their places of origin. In addition, for communities in Druze-armed group-controlled areas, permission from local authorities led by Sheikh Al-Hijri is required for any travel outside their areas of control, which is reportedly limited to international travel and medical appointments. Bedouin communities from mixed villages currently under government control are not permitted to return.

130. These factors, and continuing limitations regarding the availability of electricity and water which appear to *prima facie* constitute ongoing violations of the international humanitarian law, combined with periodic clashes on the line of contact, reinforce the perception based on these lived experiences of the civilian population in Suwayda National Guard (formerly SMCAG groups)-controlled territory that they remain besieged, regardless of the level of humanitarian and commercial access available. At the same time, displaced Bedouins continue to experience ongoing humanitarian law violations related to the displacement from homes and property which intersect with ongoing human rights violations including the right to health and education. They are acutely aware of the lack of support to their situation as well as the lack of progress towards an agreement between parties that would ensure they can return to their homes in areas under Suwayda National Guard control.

131. Access to fundamental provisions necessary to the survival of the civilian population including humanitarian aid, services, and freedom of movement has been used by both the government and the leadership in Suwayda to advance their respective political objectives. The government appears to have sought to demonstrate to the population in Suwayda National Guard-controlled territory that they need state services to meet their needs, while simultaneously increasing pressure on the political and armed group leadership there. Meanwhile, the leadership in Suwayda had an interest in advancing the narrative of a siege as it advocated for the opening of a humanitarian corridor to Israel, linked to Sheikh al-Hijri's broader project seeking self-determination and autonomy. More broadly, the Suwayda-based leadership's position demonstrated the complete breakdown of trust in the new government, although it expected continued support and service provision while rejecting any communication with Damascus. Ultimately, the entire civilian population of Suwayda, whether *in situ* or displaced, has suffered sustained human rights violations due to such political manoeuvring.

Impediments to the right to education

132. During the July violence, many children were deprived of their fundamental right to education, and other rights central to the protection of children in armed conflict under United Nations Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) which stresses *inter alia* the need for parties to conflicts to ensure that children maintain access essential services to their development and protection.¹²⁵ In this period, primary and secondary schools inside Suwayda and in parts of Dar'a were used as displaced persons shelters, with schools reopening in Suwayda on 4 November, delaying the start of the school year.¹²⁶ Challenges remained due to lack of salaries and school supplies despite the reopening. Approximately 50 schools still required urgent rehabilitation, while access to educational materials and school supplies remained limited.¹²⁷

133. Many children displaced outside of Suwayda, in particular from Bedouin communities, had not yet been integrated into the educational systems at the time of the Commission's visits in rural parts of Dar'a and parts of Rural Damascus.

134. While international human rights law provides broad protections for freedom of expression, limitations exist particular for speech which constitutes advocacy of national, racial, religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.¹²⁸ Hate speech that spread against the Druze community from April onward (see below) and relayed by students

¹²⁵ <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/>

¹²⁶ Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Response in Southern Syria - Situation Report No. 4 (as of 14 December 2025), available at <https://www.unicef.org/media/177651/file/Syrian-Arab-Republic-Humanitarian-SitRep-No.17,-November-2025.pdf>

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ ICCPR Article 20.

and other civilians, further impacted many Druze university students where many faced increasing threats and intimidation online and in person. In several universities, including in Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Dar'a, WhatsApp groups and other social media platforms were used by fellow students to advocate hatred and incite discrimination, hostility and violence against Druze students.¹²⁹ At times, this contributed to physical attacks and threats of killing any Druze student who had returned to their university campus. The intimidation and harassment experienced by many Druze students created an unsafe environment, resulting in many students dropping out of their respective universities and thus limiting their access and right to education. University students the Commission interviewed conveyed a sense of desperation as neither university administrators nor government officials have sought to put in place concrete measures to positively ensuring their safety. This was despite the decision, earlier in the year, by which the Ministry of Education prohibited the publication or promotion of “any content that incites hatred, sectarianism, or racism, or undermines national unity and civil peace”, which in their experience, had not yet had effect on their ability to safely and securely continue their studies.¹³⁰

Government responses to the events in Suwayda

135. The government has announced initiatives, including humanitarian, legal and political actions, to address the events in Suwayda, though they have not necessarily been well-received by local authorities in Suwayda National Guard-controlled areas of the government. This is in addition to the government granting the Commission access to the governorates of Suwayda, Dar'a, and rural Damascus.

136. The most prominent undertaking was the above establishment of the National Inquiry on the events in Suwayda established by the Ministry of Justice pursuant to decree No. 1287 of 2025, modelled on the National Inquiry established for the March 2025 violence in coastal and western central Syria. This domestic investigation is acknowledged by the Commission of Inquiry, for demonstrating a willingness to address the causes and conditions conducive to violence, and its potential to provide some transparency and accountability for victims and communities. The formation of that committee was met with protests inside Suwayda against its formation and rejection by Suwayda-based authorities and to the Commission's knowledge was not permitted by local authorities to access the areas of Suwayda outside of government control..

137. In the government's reply to the Commission's note verbale requesting information on events in Suwayda, it transmitted some information from the National Inquiry. In particular, the Government's reply in part V stated that:

“The National Committee for Investigation into the Suwayda events has not yet announced the results of its work, but would like to share with the COI a summary on the numbers of the arrested or released suspects according to the following:

Ten accused persons are still detained in Adra prison, after interrogating them, taking their statements and issuing an indictment against them, including six members of the Syrian Bedouin tribes and four Syrian Druze individuals.

Twenty accused members of the security and army are still detained by the military police, after interrogating them, taking their statements and issuing an indictment against them.

The judicial police released 58 Syrian Druze people after completing the investigation.

In addition, several others were released by the Public Prosecution, and the Committee does not know the exact number because its mission ends with a referral to the judiciary.”

138. On 17 March, the National Investigation Committee on Suwayda held a press conference to present the findings of the report it handed over to the Ministry of Justice regarding the events that unfolded between 11 and 20 July 2025. The Committee reported that its inquiry documented grave human rights violations, including killings, torture, armed robbery, property destruction, and sectarian incitement, which it said were individual and not systematic. The Committee noted that events prompted Israeli airstrikes on Syrian governmental positions in Suwayda and

¹²⁹ ICCPR, Article 20.

¹³⁰ <https://archive.sana.sy/en/?p=355211>

Damascus, qualifying those as serious violation of Syria's sovereignty with dangerous implications for wider regional security. The Committee stated that government security units attempted to stop armed tribal convoys from reaching Suwayda, but they were not fully contained because of the sheer numbers and laxity by some personnel. The Committee also noted it faced access restrictions to some areas inside Suwayda, which it said it circumvented through alternative methods.¹³¹

139. According to the Committee, 1,760 people were killed and 2,188 injured across all sides and communities. The investigation also recorded prisoner exchanges, including the release of 119 Druze and 25 people from Bedouin, tribal and government forces, and noted that several people remained missing. It also reported that tens of thousands were displaced and at least 36 villages suffered extensive destruction and arson. Religious sites belonging to Druze and Christian communities were attacked by armed groups driven by looting and revenge. The Committee said witnesses described both protection and abuse by State security forces and it attributed responsibility for violations to a variety of actors including local armed groups, individuals linked to Da'esh, and individual members of government security and military forces, adding that 23 government personnel had already been arrested. All relevant information was referred to the judiciary for further action, the Committee stated.¹³²

140. The Committee also issued recommendations aimed at achieving justice, stability, and preventing future violations. These included further judicial investigations, enhanced civilian protection, support for displaced people, and security sector reform through independent oversight and human rights training. It also urged greater efforts to address the plight of missing persons and expand humanitarian assistance and condemned violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity by Israel. The Committee emphasized that such steps are essential for justice, redress, and sustainable peace.¹³³

141. Despite the above, the Commission notes that the rank and role of the accused or investigated government forces, and whether they include any commanders or any other person in positions of responsibility for the planning and execution of the military and security operations in Suwayda, has not been announced. Aside from the transfer of Brigadier General Dalati, commander of Internal Security Forces in Suwayda during the events, the Commission is not aware of other changes to commanders of units involved in the July events. Reportedly, some of the accused, including government forces, were released following the issuance of Presidential Decree No. (39) of 2026 on the General Amnesty.¹³⁴

142. In addition, the government has reported that payment of salaries and pensions were resumed for public employees and pensioners while a controversial home rehabilitation project to renovate burned and damaged homes in the western and northern villages was also underway. While there are reports that homeowners have not agreed to the rehabilitation projects undertaken in this regard, in meetings with the National Inquiry, they stressed that rehabilitation of homes is only taking place by homeowners themselves, with access and security supported by the government.

143. At the broader political level, the Syria government concluded a tripartite agreement along with the Kingdom of Jordan and the United State on 16 September referred to as the Roadmap for Resolving the Crisis in Suwayda and Stabilizing Southern Syria. The roadmap, which was officially transmitted to the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly and widely welcomed,¹³⁵ emphasized Syria's unity and territorial integrity while outlining a number of steps needed to help restore trust leading to the governorate's full reintegration into the Syrian state. This included the need to ensure accountability for violations, continued delivery of humanitarian aid, restoration of all basic services, and the securing of the Suwayda-

¹³¹ <https://sana.sy/en/syria/2303648/>.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ <https://sana.sy/presidency/2407527/>. The government stated in its response of 17 March 2026 that it had arrested the perpetrators of moustache-cutting incidents and one perpetrator in the case of the three men killed while being forced off the balcony of a building in Suwayda city on 16 July. The Commission is seeking further details.

¹³⁵ <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/586>

Damascus Road, among others. Local authorities in Suwayda issued a statement rejecting the roadmap as a solution imposed externally, among other criticisms.¹³⁶

144. As of the drafting of this report, the parties remained at an impasse, with limited progress in implementing the roadmap. The National Guard and local authorities in Suwayda have been unwilling to engage substantively with the government, to participate in mediation or dialogue initiatives, or to allow the National Inquiry access to areas under its control. For its part, the Syrian government has empowered Druze leaders who are not seen as legitimate by many in Suwayda following the July escalation. Amid this deadlock, the civilian population, including the thousands of displaced, has borne the cost. Grassroots initiatives, including a recently launched initiative dubbed “the third current”, have been attempting to break the impasse amidst restrictions on political activity not in line with the local authorities in Suwayda. The governor of Suwayda has launched his own initiative as well dubbed “toward a safe future for Suwayda” aimed at finding a solution to the continued crisis.

VII. Legal Findings

145. Regarding the applicable international legal framework, it is reasonable to conclude that from July onward, an armed conflict not of an international nature was taking place in the Syrian Arab Republic between the government and coalitions of Druze armed groups (see Annex III on the applicable law).¹³⁷ This would entail the applicability of international humanitarian law to these events. Given that the Syrian Arab Republic is not a party to Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (8 June 1977), the applicable framework is found in Article 3 Common to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and customary international humanitarian law. At the same time, international human rights law also remained applicable, with such obligations attaching to the Syrian Arab Republic and its government as arise from treaty obligations and customary international law, and as acknowledged in the government’s Constitutional Declaration.¹³⁸ The Commission considers the tribal fighters that accompanied government forces between 14-16 July to have been part of the operation under the effective control of the government forces, with their acts imputable to the State. For tribal fighters taking part in fighting preceding and after that period, the Commission considers such persons to have been directly participating in hostilities insofar as their conduct is referenced in relation to armed conflict described in this report. Israeli forces conducting operations impacting Syrian territory remain bound by international humanitarian law applicable in international armed conflicts. Regarding events between 30 April and 13 July, further information would be required concerning the organisation of groups that took part in clashes in Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya, Breq, and Maqwas prior to the intervention of the government. Findings below concerning those events reflect this ambiguity concerning the applicable framework at that time.

146. In relation to the events that took place in July 2025, as set out above in section [IV], there are reasonable grounds to believe that government forces — including Internal Security Forces (General Security), the Syrian Arab Army, and tribal fighters operating alongside them, engaged in acts that amounted to violations of international humanitarian law, including acts that may amount to war crimes, as well as serious and cumulative violations of international human rights law.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ See:

<https://www.facebook.com/slcaosorg/posts/pfbid0p8wfnUA2eeJ9gaJqwU7Rd8PFJ8aveq37a95aKDDza77ujBL3AQHSLQEq8EmnFDKtI>

¹³⁷ It should also be noted that other international armed conflicts and non-international armed conflicts remain ongoing in the Syrian Arab Republic in parallel during the period under consideration.

¹³⁸ Constitutional Declaration of 12 March 2025, Article 12, available at <https://sana.sy/?p=2198312>. The Syrian Arab Republic is party to the following international human rights law treaties: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1969), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1969), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969), the Convention on the Rights of Child (1993), as well as its Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2003), the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2003), and the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment (2004). See also, Annex III (Applicable Law).

¹³⁹ The Commission continues its investigations into allegations concerning the commission of violations by members of specific units and groups. Further, acts and omissions described in this report likely amount to crimes under the

147. In particular, personnel of the Internal Security Forces (General Security), the Syrian Arab Army, along with tribal fighters operating in tandem, committed unlawful killings and torture in multiple locations in Suwayda governorate, in violation of the international humanitarian law prohibitions against committing violence to the physical or mental well-being of protected persons, in particular murder of all kinds, cruel treatment and torture and outrages upon personal dignity between 14 and 16 July. Tribal fighters participating in hostilities between 17 and 19 July similarly violated international humanitarian law prohibitions against committing violence to the physical or mental well-being of protected persons, in particular murder of all kinds, cruel treatment and torture. Acts of murder also appear to have been committed with discriminatory intent targeting individuals and families because of their membership in an identifiable group. Such acts also demonstrate a gender-based targeting with men and boys at particular risk of targeting. Such acts may amount to war crimes. They also constitute violations of the right to life and to freedom from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment under international human rights law in relation to the actions of government forces and tribal fighters operating under their effective control.

148. Additionally, in these locations, the government did not fulfil its obligation to exercise due diligence and protect the right to life including in the investigation of violations and a failure to ensure freedom from torture and ill-treatment by preventing private individuals from committing such acts.¹⁴⁰ Though statements were issued by the government during the events stating that violations were prohibited and that groups not affiliated with the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior were prevented from entering, numerous accounts indicated that official forces were either present and operating together with such groups and were present when violations took place between 14 and 16 July.¹⁴¹ During the period 17-19 July, government forces at a minimum failed to prevent the entry of tribal fighters that engaged in such acts.

149. The Commission also documented at least two cases of rape of a woman and a girl by individuals belonging to mixed forces during the period under review.¹⁴² In addition, the Commission documented forced nudity, humiliating sexualized searches and threats of rape or other sexual violence in violation of both humanitarian law protections and human rights obligations in relation to the 14-16 July period. There are therefore reasonable grounds to believe that such forces committed rape in violation of international humanitarian law, which may amount to war crimes. In addition, rape and other forms of sexual violence, in that they were carried out in the context of discrimination against women because they were Druze, amounts to torture and persecution. Such acts may also amount to war crimes. Further, the sexual and gender-based violence described in this report also comprise violations of the right to freedom from torture, cruel, inhuman and ill-treatment as well as the right to security of person.

150. Internal Security Forces (General Security), the Syrian Arab Army, along with tribal fighters operating in tandem, also arbitrarily deprived individuals of liberty in violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law between 14 and 16 July. Tribal fighters also arbitrarily detained individuals during the 17-19 July period in violation of international humanitarian law. Many of the arbitrarily detained were also subjected to enforced disappearance, and though the fate of most of the initially disappeared have been resolved through the discovery of bodies, the release of detainees or facilitation of communication with their families. The fate and whereabouts of at least 100 others still remain unknown at the time of writing. This also implicates the government's human rights obligations regarding the failure to exercise due diligence to prevent such reasonably foreseeable deprivations of liberty from occurring and adequately investigating to identify responsibility for these violations. Many of those detained by government forces and tribal fighters were held as hostages and released in exchange for captives held by the SMCAGs, which amounted to hostage taking in violation of international humanitarian law.¹⁴³ Many of the acts above may also amount to war crimes.

151. There are also reasonable grounds to believe that the same security forces and tribal fighters operating in tandem engaged in conduct that violated the international humanitarian law

domestic legislation of the Syrian Arab Republic for government forces, SMCAGs, and private individuals though such assessments are for domestic authorities.

¹⁴⁰ See Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, Principle 2; Committee on the Rights of the Child, concluding observations: Tajikistan, CRC/C/15/Add.136, para. 29; Committee Against Torture, concluding observations: Ethiopia, CAT/C/ETH/CO/1, para. 11.

¹⁴¹ See Section III, above, and Annex II, sections C and D, below.

¹⁴² However, as noted above this is almost certainly not the total number, see section IV and Annex II, section H.

¹⁴³ ICRC Customary International Law Study, Rule 96.

prohibition against adverse distinction founded on religion or faith and committed outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment, including the shaving of moustaches and forcing individuals to imitate animals.¹⁴⁴ In particular, outrages upon personal dignity included instances where the dead were desecrated, through burning bodies, mutilating bodies, including beheadings of bodies, as well as through mocking bodies of victims, rejoicing in their death and posting videos thereof online. These acts may also amount to war crimes. Further, desecration of the dead also gives rise to violations of international human rights law, in particular concerning freedom from torture and ill-treatment of family members of the deceased (due to the mental anguish to surviving family members caused by such acts), as well as concerning freedom of religion and belief (due to the impairment of families to bury their dead in accordance with religious and cultural traditions).¹⁴⁵

152. Through extensive looting of private property, Internal Security Forces (General Security), the Syrian Arab Army, along with tribal fighters operating in tandem and private individuals as above, engaged in pillage in violation of international humanitarian law during the 14-19 July period. Such acts may also constitute war crimes. Furthermore, the widespread attacks on and burning of homes, businesses, and religious buildings amount to violations of the prohibition of attacking civilian objects and, in relation to religious buildings, the prohibition of attacks on buildings dedicated to religion. These acts may also amount to war crimes.¹⁴⁶ They also amount to unlawful interference with privacy, family, and home under international human rights law. The deliberate cutting of electricity cables and damage to infrastructure may amount to violations of the prohibition of attacks on objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population in violation of international humanitarian law.¹⁴⁷

153. Regarding the broader nature of the attack, the Commission also examined whether these violations and acts that may amount to war crimes set out above may qualify as crimes against humanity. As examined by the Commission in other contexts, the acts set out above, including but not limited to murder, torture, rape forms of sexual violence of comparable gravity, discriminatory acts that may amount to persecution, enforced disappearances, and other inhumane acts may amount to crimes against humanity when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack. Crimes against humanity have five elements: there must have been an attack; the attack must have been directed against the civilian population; the attack must be widespread or systematic; the acts of the perpetrator must form part of the attack; and the perpetrator must know that there is an attack directed against the civilian population.¹⁴⁸ In this regard the Commission relies on the definition contained in the Rome Statute insofar as it reflects customary international criminal law though it also applies the requirement that the attack be carried out as part of a State or organizational policy.¹⁴⁹

154. In relation to the first element, given that the violence took place in the context of a non-international armed conflict and involved the advance of government forces into civilian populated areas, the existence of an attack in ordinary context of that conflict does not appear to be at issue.¹⁵⁰ That the attack was directed against the civilian population pursuant to a state or organizational policy such requires further examination.

155. The Commission notes that the that the violence directed against civilians described above was not uniform, and that the violence described above cannot be imputed to every member of government forces and tribal fighters that took part in this operation. There was some attempt, at least at the outset of operations in the western villages, to provide phone numbers to contact government forces in case of problems or to indicate that a house had already been

¹⁴⁴ See Article 3 Common to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and ICRC Customary International Law Study, rules 88 and 90.

¹⁴⁵ For an overview of impacted rights, see Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Protection of the dead, A/HRC/56/56, 25 April 2024, paras 10-13.

¹⁴⁶ ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study, rules 7, 9, 38, 50, and 156. On the distinction between burning or arson and pillage, see, Special Court for Sierra Leone, Fofana and Kondewa Judgment on Appeal (SCSL-04-14-A) of 28 May 2008, paragraphs 389-409.

¹⁴⁷ ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study, Rule 54.

¹⁴⁸ See, A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1 (2011), para 101. See also, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 7.

¹⁴⁹ See, A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1 (2011), paras 102-106. See also, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 7(2)(a).

¹⁵⁰ See International Criminal Court, Elements of Crimes, Article 7(3), where it is stated that such an attack need not be a military attack.

searched, though these were wholly ineffective in preventing subsequent violations. In some cases, government forces facilitated the evacuation of civilians to safer locations or for medical treatment and others intervened to prevent their colleagues from killing or physically harming them, though in such cases individuals were still subjected to other forms of violence, including insults, threats, and theft.¹⁵¹

156. It is also apparent that different Syrian Arab Army and Internal Security Force units that did not engage in violence against civilians themselves were also aware of the danger posed to civilians by other units, either because they were present or nearby when violence was occurring, or because they themselves warned civilians of certain dangers from their co-parties. There were also statements from the Ministries of Defence and Interior that emphasized the necessity of preventing violations, pledged to hold perpetrators accountable, announced the prohibition of any groups not affiliated to the Ministries of Defence and Interior to enter Suwayda, as well as reiterated that Army personnel were not permitted to deviate from orders or deployment locations.¹⁵² In President al-Sharaa's speech on 17 July, he similarly pledged to hold anyone accountable who wronged the Druze community, rejected sectarian violence, emphasized the Druze community as a fundamental part of the Syrian social fabric and committed to protecting their rights.¹⁵³ Yet the disconnect between communications from senior government officials and commanders and the findings above is great.

157. In this regard, the capacity limitations of government's forces — given the not yet completed integration of former armed group factions under a single command¹⁵⁴ and the recent recruitment of large numbers of new personnel with limited training and absent comprehensive lustration or vetting of new recruits to identify prior responsibility for human rights and humanitarian law violations—would have limited the effectiveness of efforts to prevent such violations. It is arguable that the risk of violence at this scale harming the civilian population, in deploying insufficiently integrated forces it may not be able to contain, should have been foreseeable — especially in the wake of both the coastal violence in March, which entailed some of the same patterns of successive home raids, killings, and torture and ill-treatment, as well as the increasing sectarian rhetoric following the falsely attributed voice recording and the resulting clashes in Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya, Jaramana, and Breq in April and May.

158. The Commission has not uncovered information indicating the attack on Druze population of Suwayda was part of the initial governmental plan. Yet based on the immediacy of the onset of severe violence against the civilian population between 14 and 16 July, as well as the inclusion of irregular tribal fighters in the operations, it is reasonable to conclude that the decision to proceed with the operation, in combination with the failure to take effective action to prevent imminently foreseeable violence, may reflect an organizational policy across at least a subset of commanders aimed at facilitating an imminently foreseeable attack against the civilian population.¹⁵⁵ That this plan may have formed among operational commanders as the events were unfolding does not negate the existence of such a policy. Their failure to prevent the entry of tribal fighters into Suwayda after the formal withdrawal of government forces, despite being stationed along the same routes employed by the advancing tribal fighters, may provide further indication of such a policy. Unlike the Commission's recent report on the coastal violence where the policy element could not be established due to a lack of identification of the organisational structure to which such a policy could be imputed, the widespread and systematic attack on the civilian population in Suwayda took place in the context of an organised, official governmental

¹⁵¹ Though many were still robbed of all their valuables even in such cases.

¹⁵² For example, <https://x.com/AlekhbariahSY/status/1945058116044783663>

¹⁵³ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ioYA-gr0YTM>. See also the President's 19 July speech with similar statements: <https://x.com/SyPresidency/status/1945686718532747492> [at 7 minutes, 20 seconds into the speech].

¹⁵⁴ The Government of Syria had begun to integrate armed factions under a single command by December 2025, see Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary A. DiCarlo's Remarks to the Security Council on Syria, New York, 18 December 2025, <https://dppa.un.org/en/mtg-sc-10072-usg-dicarlo-18-dec-2025>

¹⁵⁶ See HRC/59/CRP.4, para 89. See, International Criminal Court, Prosecutor v. Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, Trial Judgment, ICC-01/05-01/08, 21 March 2016, paragraphs 684 and 685. See also, International Criminal Court, Elements of Crimes, Article 7, paragraph 3, footnote 6, “Such a policy may, in exceptional circumstances, be implemented by a deliberate failure to take action, which is consciously aimed at encouraging such attack. The existence of such a policy cannot be inferred solely from the absence of governmental or organizational action.”

operation.¹⁵⁶ This does not presuppose that all levels of the security forces were involved in or facilitated such a policy, but neither does it exclude that possibility.¹⁵⁷

159. In sum, it is reasonable to conclude that government forces and tribal fighters operating alongside them engaged in extrajudicial killings and torture and ill-treatment of primarily the civilian population of mixed and majority Druze western villages and the city of Suwayda neighbourhoods on 14-16 July pursuant to an organisational policy across a subset of commanders who enabled multiple commission of the acts described above.

160. Turning to the widespread and systematic nature of the attack, the Commission recalls that this is a disjunctive requirement and such an attack against the civilian population need only be either widespread or systematic. Killings of civilians by government forces and tribal fighters operating in tandem occurred between 14 and 16 July in documented cases across the western villages of rural Suwayda and in the series of massacres in the city set out in detail in Annex II. The Commission documented severe violence directed at such civilian populations in different locations across the governorate accompanied by sectarian slurs and insults. The consistent patterns of violence against the civilian population — including targeting based on religious affiliation, age and gender, removal of individuals from homes and collective execution of groups of people across these areas from when government and tribal forces entered, the specific targeting of affluent families, as well as the deferral of decisions on whether a person was killed or spared to a commanders¹⁵⁸ — indicates that such acts were not random or isolated.¹⁵⁹ In this regard, it is reasonable to conclude that the attack was both widespread and systematic in nature.

161. Furthermore, those who engaged in these acts were likely aware of the widespread and systematic nature of the violence and still engaged in extreme violence with that knowledge.¹⁶⁰ It is also readily apparent that the perpetrators, including in filming and broadcasting themselves committing violations, acted as if they expected complete impunity for their actions.

162. As such, should the acts and the elements described above be established through further investigation, the acts may amount to the crimes against humanity of murder, severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law, torture, persecution on religious grounds, and other inhumane acts intentionally causing great suffering or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health.

163. Despite the above finding, it must also be noted that the Government took steps to provide accountability, including by establishing an independent investigation and arresting some alleged perpetrators that appeared in social media carrying out violence.¹⁶¹ This is in line with the State's obligations to investigate acts that may amount to war crimes as described above under international humanitarian law as well as the obligation to investigate alleged violations of human rights violations, notably in relation to the rights to life and freedom from torture and ill-

¹⁵⁶ See HRC/59/CRP.4, para 89. See, International Criminal Court, Prosecutor v. Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, Trial Judgment, ICC-01/05-01/08, 21 March 2016, paragraphs 684 and 685. See also, International Criminal Court, Elements of Crimes, Article 7, paragraph 3, footnote 6, “Such a policy may, in exceptional circumstances, be implemented by a deliberate failure to take action, which is consciously aimed at encouraging such attack. The existence of such a policy cannot be inferred solely from the absence of governmental or organizational action.”

¹⁵⁷ During its investigative missions for the purposes of this report, the Commission sought interviews with Ministry of Defence officials. These had not yet been granted at the time of writing.

¹⁵⁸ Including via radio, see Section Detailed Factual Findings, Annex II, section D.

¹⁵⁹ See, International Criminal Court, Katanga Trial Judgment, ICC-01/04-01/07, of 7 March 2014, para 1113. “In the Chamber’s opinion, the adjective “systematic” allows the nature of the attack, understood in a broad sense, to be characterised and to bring to the fore the existence of a pattern of repeated conduct or the recurring or continuous perpetration of interlinked, non-random acts of violence that establish the existence of a crime against humanity... Such analysis also entails inquiry as to whether a series of repeated actions seeking to produce always the same effects on a civilian population was undertaken with consideration – identical acts or similarities in criminal practices, continual repetition of a same modus operandi, similar treatment meted out to victims or consistency in such treatment across a wide geographic area.” (internal citations omitted).

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 1110.

¹⁶¹ In this context, the above-mentioned 19 July speech by President Al Shara reiterated that the Syrian state is committed to protecting all minorities and sects in the country, and that it is proceeding with holding all violators accountable from any side, and no person will escape accountability, disavowing all the crimes that took place, “whether from within As-Suwayda or outside it”, and emphasized the importance of achieving justice and imposing the law on everyone.

treatment.¹⁶² The Commission also recalls that obligations to investigate violations of international humanitarian law and acts that may amount to war crimes includes the obligation to fully and comprehensively examine command responsibility, for ordering violations but also for situations where commanders knew, or had reason to know that forces under their command were committing or about to commit such crimes and they failed to take all necessary and reasonable measures in their power to prevent such violations or punish perpetrators.¹⁶³

164. In this regard, the Commission is not yet aware of any effort to examine the strategic decision-making that contributed to the violence against civilians and the possibility that components of government forces would have formed an organisational policy to facilitate an attack on the civilian population. Even at the tactical level, there is no information available concerning whether any unit or organisational commander has been subject to any investigation or faced disciplinary measures for the loss of control of the forces under their command, or for allowing irregular forces to accompany their official operations. While some commanders have been rotated, there remains a lack of information on steps taken by the government to hold operational commanders accountable for either directing or allowing violations to occur.¹⁶⁴

165. Regarding SMCAGs in Suwayda, there are also reasonable grounds to believe that such groups launched indiscriminate and direct attacks on the civilian population and displaced the civilian population in the absence of imperative military necessity nor for the protection of the civilians concerned, notably in Shahba, Sahwet Balata, and Um Elzaytun, in violation of international humanitarian law. There are also reasonable grounds to believe that SMCAGs engaged in murder in violation of international humanitarian law. In hanging and displaying bodies of Bedouin persons there are reasonable grounds to believe that such groups committed outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment. These groups also engaged in arbitrary detention, hostage-taking, and torture and ill-treatment in violation of international humanitarian law. There are also reasonable grounds to believe that such actors made religious buildings and objects the object of attack, also in violation of international humanitarian law. The Commission also notes that the combined effects of the actions of the SMCAGs resulted in the displacement of nearly the entire Bedouin population from areas under their control, which may amount to collective punishment. Ongoing inability of that population to return implicates ongoing violations in respect of forced displacement. Each of the preceding acts may also amount to war crimes. The acts above were often carried out accompanied by overt sectarian insults and on the basis of religious, ethnic, and cultural heritage in violation of the prohibition of adverse distinction. In some cases where the fate and whereabouts of individuals last seen in SMCAG custody remains unknown, such groups may have engaged in acts tantamount to enforced disappearance.

166. Both government forces and SMCAGs may have impeded the passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need during the first few days following the 19 July ceasefire agreement, in violation of international humanitarian law. SARC convoys, also carrying UN and ICRC supplies, were entering as of 20 July, followed by the ICRC, while UN-led convoys received approval from 29 July onwards.¹⁶⁵ From the government side, the failure to immediately facilitate all impartial offers for the transmission of humanitarian aid to affected populations during the most acute phase following the ceasefire did not appear to be based on any imperative military

¹⁶² Regarding violations of international humanitarian law and those that may amount to war crimes see Article 1 Common to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 as well as ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study, Rule 158. Regarding the obligation to investigate alleged violations of international human rights law, see for example, United Nations Human Rights Committee, General Comment no. 36 on the right to life, Section III on the Duty to Protect Life, CCPR/C/GC/36, 3 September 2019 and Committee against Torture, General Comment no. 2 on Implementation of article 2 by States parties. Section III, Content of the obligation to take effective measures to prevent torture, CAT/C/GC/2, 24 January 2008.

¹⁶³ See ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law study, rules 152, 153, and 158. Reportedly, some of the accused government forces were released following the issuance of Presidential Decree No. (39) of 2026 on the General Amnesty. These reports are currently under investigation.

¹⁶⁴ Also, it should be noted that the fact that many of the alleged perpetrators comprised individuals and forces acting in their official capacity attaches the international responsibility of the State See, Articles 1, 4, and 7, International Law Commission Draft Articles of Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 10 (A/56/10), chap. IV, sect. E. (2001), Article 3, Convention (IV) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex: Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land. The Hague, 18 October 1907, and ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study, rule 149.

¹⁶⁵ <https://ir.icrc.org/en/2025/07/syria-icrc-gains-access-to-sweida-calls-for-sustained-humanitarian-response/>

necessity.¹⁶⁶ From the SMCAG side, the refusal to permit the passage of humanitarian aid offered by government ministries and agencies was also impeded for reasons unrelated to imperative military necessity during this period.

167. Lastly, in relation to the events in Jaramana and Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya, the Commission was unable to determine the precise forces responsible for the murders, ill-treatment and theft detailed in this report. Nevertheless, at a minimum, in connection with the events described in paragraphs 22-24 above, given the nature of force employed by non-state groups operating concurrently against SMCAGs, in failing to prevent the use of force by private individuals during and after armed confrontations, government forces may have violated the right to life.¹⁶⁷ Insofar as international humanitarian law applies, there are also reasonable grounds to believe that violations of the prohibitions against murder and pillage occurred in relation to home raids, killings, and theft that occurred at the hands of the armed groups comprised of displaced Sunni fighters. In such paradigm, those acts may also amount to war crimes.

168. On a final note, notwithstanding the applicability of the law of non-international armed conflict, numerous acts by parties to the conflict described in this report are likely to amount to crimes under the domestic legislation of the Syrian Arab Republic, including acts that also amount to violations or abuses of international human rights law.¹⁶⁸

VIII. Conclusions and Recommendations

169. The crisis in Suwayda, as of the preparation of this report, remains at a dangerous impasse. Although an uneasy ceasefire is currently in effect, it is frequently violated by sporadic clashes and incidents. The area controlled by the Suwayda National Guard (SNG) is isolated from the rest of the country and is characterized by highly militarized lines of control. The SNG, which was formed by consolidating SMCAGs, is reportedly suppressing dissent, as demonstrated by restrictions placed on civic and religious leaders and other individuals, preventing them from freely expressing their views if they are not aligned with the local authorities. This repression has led to outbreaks of violence, including the killing of two Druze Sheikhs and a poet in late 2025.

170. Efforts to initiate dialogue between the parties have seen limited progress, and the divide between the main actors remains substantial. On 26 February 2026, a prisoner exchange supervised by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) took place, during which the government released 61 detainees and the Suwayda National Guard freed 25 captives. Despite this exchange, at least 155 individuals remain missing. Nearly 155,000 people remain displaced, with the majority residing in areas under SNG control and the rest almost entirely outside the governorate. Freedom of movement is severely restricted, preventing most displaced people from attempting to return to their original homes. This is primarily due to concerns over security, lack of approval, lack of trust, or a combination of these factors. However, commercial traffic has resumed, and the payment of salaries and pensions has restarted. Humanitarian access has become routine, alleviating some of the most acute challenges faced by affected communities.

171. All communities in Suwayda have suffered immensely from recent events, enduring significant hardship and trauma. The violence has resulted in the loss of far too many lives, leaving families and entire communities shattered. Particularly, the Druze population has been subjected to severe sectarian violence, leading to massive displacement that is expected to persist for an extended period. This displacement is exacerbated by the widespread destruction of tens of thousands of homes through scorched earth tactics, which has left the community deeply traumatized and distrustful. The situation has been further aggravated by the proliferation of hate speech on social media, which has intensified existing divisions within the community.

172. Similarly, the Bedouin communities of Suwayda, historically marginalized and discriminated against by previous governments, have suffered from a range of violations. These culminated in their forcible displacement from nearly all areas of the governorate. Many Bedouin

¹⁶⁶ The Syrian government, in its response of 17 March to the Commission's draft report, stated it that granted unconditional permission for the entry of humanitarian aid, encouraged humanitarian actors to enter, and provided funding.

¹⁶⁷ See also, Annex II, section A.

¹⁶⁸ See Section IV, above, as well as Annex II, sections A, C, D, F, H, and I. See also Annex III (Applicable Law).

individuals interviewed emphasized their status as a minority group within Suwayda, underscoring the importance of respecting their rights and ensuring their representation in local governance. At present, these communities are largely scattered across rural areas of Dar'a and Damascus, living in dire conditions and remaining mostly excluded from ongoing political discussions regarding Suwayda's future.

173. The nature of Israeli intervention in Suwayda has added another layer of complexity to any potential resolution of the situation. Among Druze community members, opinions regarding Israel's involvement are divided. Some expressed gratitude for the intervention, crediting it with ending the killings. However, others repeatedly voiced concerns that Israeli involvement and its public statements from the outset only served to inflame sectarian tensions against the community, potentially making the massacres in July more likely.

174. The legacy of smuggling, criminal activity, and general lawlessness in the border regions further complicates the overall situation. The ongoing instability in these areas provides lucrative opportunities for organized crime, perpetuating the cycle of disorder and making efforts toward lasting stability even more challenging.

175. Although perspectives varied many civilians from both groups recalled living together peacefully for generations. While disputes did occur, sometimes escalating to violence, these issues were traditionally resolved through local mediation practices.

176. A prevailing sentiment among many was that recent violence was imposed by outside forces, rather than stemming from inherent differences between the communities. Some questioned whether coexistence would be possible after the events, as both communities felt betrayed by their former neighbours. Nevertheless, a majority agreed that sectarian rhetoric and discrimination increased significantly following the fall of the former government, particularly in the period leading up to the July violence.

177. Despite these challenges, most interviewees did not view the initial outbreak of violence as overtly sectarian; rather, they saw it as part of established local patterns of conflict resolution. However, the sectarian dimension intensified during interventions by the government and Israel, reinforcing the perception that actors motivated by hatred exploited the crisis to perpetrate sectarian violence.

178. Many interviewees acknowledged the suffering experienced by all people of Suwayda and expressed a strong desire to live in peace under a state that upholds the rule of law and ensures equal rights for all citizens. Across different communities, there were widespread calls for justice for all victims, accountability for perpetrators, restoration of property and security, and credible assurances to prevent future occurrences of such violence.

179. Notably, many individuals—especially among Druze victims—expressed a preference for international justice mechanisms, citing a lack of trust in the government's ability to hold perpetrators accountable and deliver justice to the victims.

180. The government faces a significant challenge in rebuilding trust and meeting victims' expectations for accountability and justice. Initial actions, such as establishing a National Inquiry under the Ministry of Justice and arresting some perpetrators, have been positively received. However, communication regarding these justice efforts has been deemed insufficient by many.

181. While early steps are important, affected communities expect timely justice that aligns with the international legal obligations of both state and non-state actors, as well as a sustained commitment to ending impunity for all violations.

182. The urgent question of whether certain practices are tolerated within segments of the security service must be addressed immediately. This is the case for both members of the security forces that engaged in violations, as well as the groups of tribal or other fighters that accompanied state forces who operated without identifiable uniforms or in civilian clothes. It is essential to identify any members of the leadership within the security forces who permit or organize such activities. Once identified, these individuals should be removed from command and held accountable. The process of ensuring accountability must go beyond arresting only those whose abuses were self-documented or easily identifiable from videos. It must extend to all individuals implicated by evidence, reaching every appropriate level within the chain of command.

183. Another major issue to address is the mobilization of tribal fighters, together with the hate speech and misinformation that fueled their involvement and associated violations. The

proliferation and under regulation of weapons further enabled these groups to operate outside the control of state institutions, which were either unwilling or unable to confront them.

184. The situation is further complicated by family and tribal affiliations within state forces, which can create conflicts between traditional and formal obligations. It is imperative that informal, unaccountable, and plausibly deniable arrangements that obscure responsibility for the actions of forces alongside formal state actors must not be repeated.

185. The government has an obligation to identify the structures and personnel who either facilitated or failed to prevent the actions of these mobilized fighters. There must be accountability and a concerted effort to address the structural reasons behind the failure to constrain their actions.

186. There is currently no indication that the SNG has recognized or investigated violations and abuses committed by its forces during recent events. In response to inquiries from the Commission, a representative of the local authorities in Suwayda affirmed that substantial efforts were made to prevent violence, and any violations that occurred were attributed to anger, oppression, injustice, and revenge arising from aggression. Nonetheless, regardless of the motives, the obligation to investigate violations of international humanitarian law remains. The violations documented in this report on the part of forces now under the SNG are extremely serious and demand urgent accountability measures.

187. The issues related to the displaced population and the widespread damage, destruction, and theft of property, especially in northern and western villages—require urgent attention. Compensation and support for reconstruction should be provided to facilitate voluntary, safe, sustainable and dignified returns for civilians while recognizing the massive needs across the country.¹⁶⁹ The Commission acknowledges the governor's efforts in rehabilitating homes and repairing damaged infrastructure. Such efforts should be made in consultation and dialogue with property owners and the impact of the wider communities.

188. Nearly all Bedouins have been forcibly displaced from areas under the control of authorities in Suwayda. The authorities have a responsibility to facilitate the safe and sustainable return of these communities to their homes, where many families have lived for over five generations. In response to questions about Bedouin displacement, local authorities stated that the Bedouin community could return when conditions improve.

189. The Commission believes that it is important to actively work towards creating the conditions necessary for the return of all affected communities. Only when meaningful and significant return of Druze and Bedouins is taking place can the realization of remedies be seen in practice. Regardless of the political outcomes of this crisis, the emphasis must be on protecting all civilians, without distinction.

190. Beyond accountability, addressing the fundamental political issues at the heart of the Suwayda crisis is urgently required. This is necessary not only to resolve the situation in Suwayda but also to address challenges in other parts of Syria where unresolved governance issues could escalate into conflict.

191. Many Syrians interviewed by the Commission highlighted a shift in optimism regarding the country's trajectory following the events in Suwayda. Despite previous attacks, the majority in Suwayda managed to maintain neutrality during the prolonged conflict from 2011 to 2024. Druze communities largely refrained from joining Syrian military, police, and intelligence forces outside the governorate, though exceptions existed. Notably as of August 2023, Suwayda became a site for anti-government protests with some slogans associated with the political opposition and directed against president Assad.¹⁷⁰ For many, these July violence's overtly sectarian nature directly conflicted with the vision for a pluralistic, rights-respecting Syria.

192. Israel's involvement in the region, asserting its role as protector of Druze communities and conducting airstrikes on Syrian government forces in Suwayda and in the heart of Damascus, has further complicated the situation. These actions follow numerous other Israeli operations aimed at expanding territorial control in Syria. The visible support for Israeli protection among some Druze leaders and factions, in the context of ongoing Israeli actions in Gaza, intertwined anti-Israeli sentiments with attitudes toward the Druze community.

¹⁶⁹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria/pillageandplunder>

¹⁷⁰ See above, footnote 20.

193. Multiple factors contributed to the inability to peacefully resolve issues in Suwayda. These included distrust between the new government and Druze religious and armed group leaders, the collective trauma of years of armed conflict and abuses during the Assad era, widespread weapons and drug smuggling, illicit networks, longstanding community disputes, displacement and abduction incidents, massacres affecting Alawite communities, and only partially resolved tensions following violence in mixed Druze areas of rural Damascus.

194. Achieving a political solution that addresses the security, peace, justice, and rights concerns of all communities in Suwayda, while respecting the aspirations of Syria's diverse population, is a complex undertaking.

195. Addressing the ongoing political crisis in Suwayda requires urgent and focused efforts. Key priorities include ensuring transparency and accountability for violations and abuses, providing guarantees to prevent their recurrence, and implementing measures to restore confidence and, ultimately, trust between communities and institutions. Additionally, neighbouring countries are called upon to respect Syria's sovereignty.

196. This process must involve meaningful and participatory dialogue on all outstanding political issues. The goal should be to find a peaceful way forward grounded in respect for the human rights of all individuals and communities.

197. To prevent recurrence of violence, ensure the enjoyment of fundamental human rights without discrimination for all, and advance efforts towards accountability, with victims' participation and involvement at the core, and the Commission makes the **following recommendations:**

To the Syrian Government:

198. **Urgently strengthen accountability** for crimes and violations committed in July 2025, at all levels of the chain of command, including for commission, for any orders given and/or for failures to prevent or punish abuses. Publicly communicate actions taken and ensure the meaningful participation of victims and victim organizations throughout investigative and accountability processes.

199. **Accelerate concrete efforts to resolve key human rights issues affecting communities in Suwayda**, potentially to be aided by a technical committee with credible and legitimate representatives, established in consultation with affected communities. Priority actions should include:

- a. Regarding **detention**, ensuring the immediate and transparent release of all detainees not accused of crimes related to the events in Suwayda; as well as medical care, including physical and psychological assessments, for detainees alleging torture or ill-treatment; and establishing credible procedures to investigate and document such allegations.
- b. Regarding the **missing**, continuing to locate, identify and return remains from mass graves, and facilitate families' access to relevant records across the contact line.¹⁷¹
- c. Expanding efforts to locate and free those **abducted or kidnapped** by armed or criminal groups, with all urgency
- d. Regarding **gender-based violence**, ensuring appropriate social and psychosocial support as well as the participation of women-led civil society in prevention, accountability and security sector transformation efforts.
- e. Regarding **returns**, expanding mutually agreed security and operational arrangements to enable forcibly displaced persons, from all communities, to first visit their homes and assess conditions, enabling safe and voluntary return.
- f. Regarding **property**, enhancing efforts to ensure the prompt restitution of property that was stolen or unlawfully occupied.

¹⁷¹ In this regard, international guidance recommends that human remains be treated with dignity and respect, properly collected, documented, preserved, and handled in accordance with chain of custody standards, without discrimination. The State should adopt appropriate laws and regulations and train law enforcement personnel to protect and properly manage human remains. See e.g. Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Protection of the dead, A/HRC/56/56, 25 April 2024 and guidance from the ICRC; including Guiding Principles for Dignified Management of the Dead in Humanitarian Emergencies and to Prevent them Becoming Missing Persons.

- g. Regarding **other economic and social rights**, alleviate the impact of the crisis by:
- i. Addressing administrative and logistical obstacles affecting salary and pension payments, as well as other essential public services, including birth and death registration.
 - ii. Strengthening security along the Damascus–Suwayda highway with professional forces to counter threats against civilians and ensure commercial traffic and freedom of movement.
 - iii. Establishing monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to keep universities safe and inclusive, facilitating the return of Druze students, and enabling disciplinary action against incitement.
 - iv. Deploying multidisciplinary teams to provide psychological, legal, and social support to affected communities.

200. **Prevent the recurrence of violence and related violations by strengthening genuine dialogue** with the Druze community, including religious, political, and civic leaders, supported by impartial mediation. Consider renewing as a confidence building measure, public apologies at the highest level for state failures and continue to support for grassroots reconciliation between Druze and Bedouin communities.

201. **Continue implementing the Commission’s recommendations** on violations in western and coastal areas to restore nationwide trust in accountability and non-recurrence, including:

- a. **Ending the deployment of undisciplined or untrained units in civilian contexts**; enforcing strict limits on home entry; and systematically applying vetting and lustration to exclude known or suspected perpetrators from security forces.
- b. **Establishing a highly trained, disciplined, and representative unit within the security structures** that can be dispatched for conflict resolution, focused on de-escalation and civilian protection in line with international law. Ideally, such a unit would be representative of diverse communities which may aid in peaceful resolution when intercommunal issues are involved in local conflict.
- c. **Engaging with religious and community leaders** to promote peaceful coexistence, tolerance and a culture of human rights and to prevent hate speech and incitement, including through early-warning mechanisms, while continuing to strengthen freedom of expression.

To Druze leaders in Suwayda:

202. **Urgently release all detainees**, or hand over to government authorities those credibly accused of crimes, with accompanying evidence.

203. **Urgently facilitate meaningful accountability** for crimes and violations committed in July or thereafter, at all levels of command, in processes compliant with international law.

204. **Engage in good-faith technical-level dialogue with relevant authorities** as an initial step to ensure that residents of Suwayda can enjoy the broadest possible economic and social rights pending resolution of the political dispute, and to accelerate progress on key human rights issues as set out above.

205. **Refrain from restricting civilians’ freedom of movement, facilitate travel outside Druze-controlled areas and respect the right of displaced persons to return**, facilitating their initial visits to homes and properties to assess conditions, enabling safe and voluntary return.

206. **Ensure the prompt restitution of property** stolen or unlawfully occupied during or after the attacks.

207. **End violence, intimidation, punishment, detention, or physical harm against dissenting voices and safeguard freedom of expression and opinion** for all residents of Suwayda—including political and religious figures, civil society actors, and journalists.

208. **To prevent recurrence of violence, facilitate participation in dialogue and local reconciliation efforts** and engagement, as above, between religious and community leaders to foster peaceful coexistence and prevent hate speech and incitement. Consider issuing a public

apology to victims for abuses committed by armed groups affiliated with the Suwayda Military Council as a step toward rebuilding trust.

To the international community:

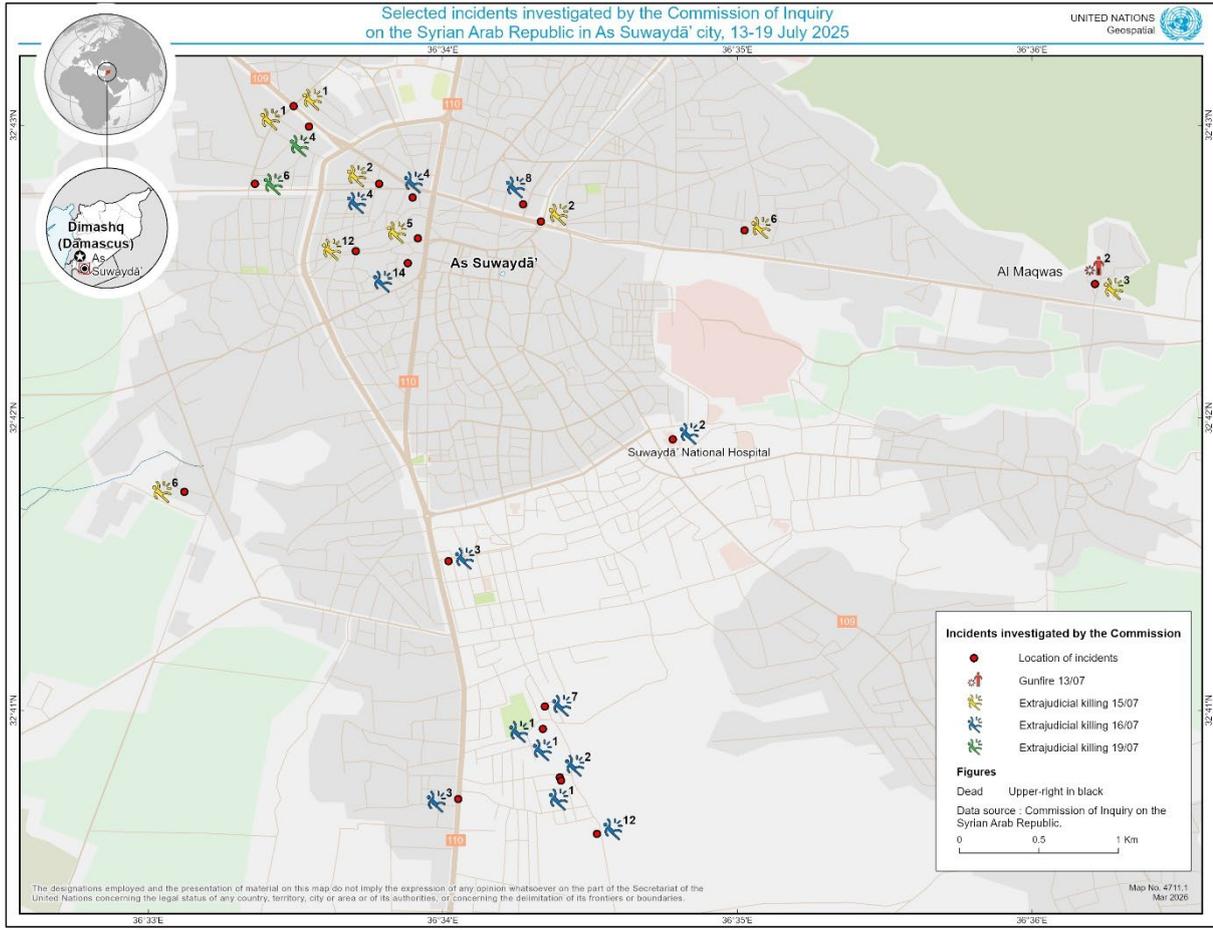
209. **Provide multilayered support** to the government in implementing the above recommendations.

210. **Exert influence** over parties responsible for crimes and violations to end abuses, conditioning financial or logistical support on compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law. Urge external actors, including Israel, to cease unilateral attacks and interference in Syria's domestic affairs that risk further destabilization and harm to civilians, undermining human rights protection.

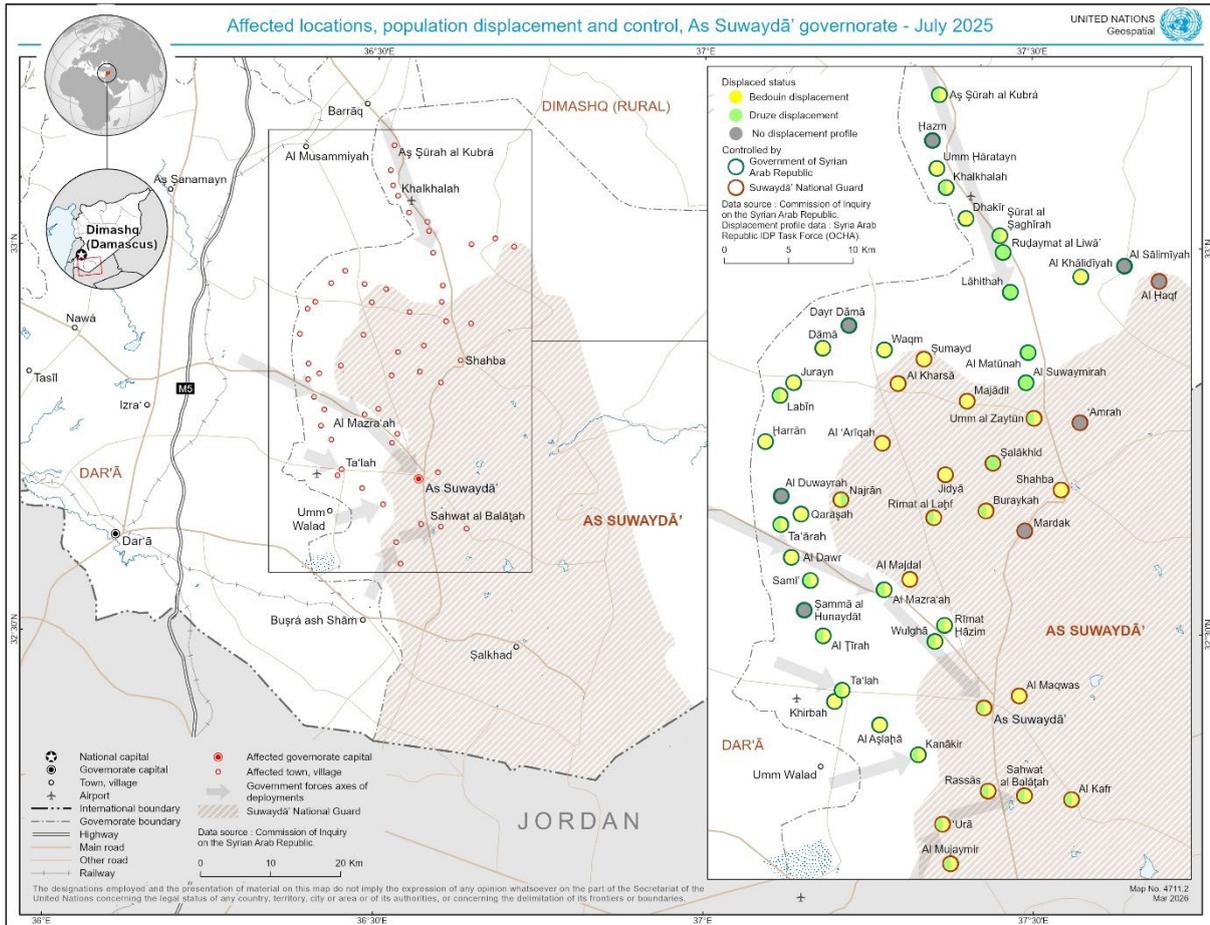
211. **Expand funding for reconstruction and humanitarian response.**

212. **Sustain flexible funding for Syrian human rights organizations**, particularly those engaged in documentation, verification and media literacy, so they can play their essential roles in promoting accountability and reconciliation, and continue supporting inclusive initiatives that promote accountability and counter incitement to violence, including online, including online.

Embargoed until 27.03.26 @ICM00



Embargoed until



Embargoed until

Annex II – Detailed Factual Findings

1. This annex, which should be read jointly with the text above, provides the detailed factual findings of the Commission concerning the situations of unrest and confrontation in Rural Damascus and northern Suwayda that preceded the July violence, as well as detailed chronologies of events and violations during the three waves of violence that characterized the Suwayda events. It then provides further detailed information on thematic issues that required further elaboration related to violations of individuals' physical integrity, in particular in relation to detention, torture and ill-treatment, sexual and gender-based violence, violations against property, and in particular related to looting and arson and attacks on religious buildings and objects, and a final section on the role of misinformation in the violence. As noted above, and in Annex III below, the situation in Suwayda amounted to a non-international armed conflict as of mid-July. Unless otherwise noted, images and video referenced in this annex were verified by the Commission and are stored in its systems.¹⁷²

A. Violence impacting civilians in Jaramana, Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya and rural Suwayda, April-May 2025

2. After the collapse of the former government, sporadic clashes and killings involving Druze-led armed groups and government forces in rural Damascus had occurred including a brief encirclement of the town of Jaramana in rural Damascus in February. After negotiations, joint security forces composed of Damascus-appointed personnel and local community members were established as part of the government's Internal Security Forces (ISF), in Jaramana, though implementation disputes remained. A similar informal arrangement in Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya led to the establishment of joint checkpoints staffed by local Druze fighters and fighters from the predominantly Sunni IDP population.

3. However, tensions rose in late April after an audio recording with offensive language against the prophet Mohammad, wrongly attributed to a Druze Sheikh, spread on social media.¹⁷³ Despite official confirmation of its falsity by the Ministry of Interior and clear denunciation by Druze leaders, the recording fuelled sectarian discourse and disrupted the relative calm in mixed Sunni-Druze areas in both Jaramana and Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya.¹⁷⁴

4. The situation escalated on the night of 28 April in Jaramana when a Druze ISF member was called to a meeting near a checkpoint and noticed several armed men on motorbikes being waived through the checkpoint by non-Druze ISF members. After identifying him as Druze, the men opened fire, injuring him and killing two nearby Druze ISF members and one civilian. Clashes continued in which seven armed men and reportedly eight civilian men, were killed. On 29 April, further negotiations with the government led to a new joint security arrangement that remained in place as of the drafting of this report.

5. In Achrafiyeh, about 13 kilometres southwest of Jaramana, clashes erupted at a joint checkpoint staffed by members of the Druze fighters from Rijal al-Karama and local Sunni IDP fighters early on 29 April, injuring several Druze. Efforts to calm tensions failed, and gunmen on rooftops caused further injuries among Rijal al-Karama members. Fighting continued throughout the day, and a brief evening truce collapsed as additional tribal fighters and other armed groups joined the local Sunni IDP fighters. On 30 April, ISF reportedly entered the area, with a former mayor and community figure appearing in a video welcoming the arrival of government forces.¹⁷⁵ Despite this, heavier clashes resumed later that day including shelling and drone strikes, injuring many civilians, including women and children. In one incident, a munition air-dropped from a small drone killed at least five men. The IDF said an Israeli strike targeted

¹⁷² The methodology employed is set out in detail in the text above under Section II, Methodology, including constraints due to resource limitations resulting from the United Nations liquidity crisis and the resulting lack of sufficient staff allocation to the Commission and impact on the availability of necessary logistics in other parts of the United Nations system to enable the Commission's investigative and analytical work.

¹⁷³ In February 2026, an activist who does not belong to the Druze community stated on social media that he created the recording, though claiming that the video was disseminated widely by others after he deleted it from his accounts. Post on file with the Commission.

¹⁷⁴ <https://sana.sy/en/syria/353862/>

¹⁷⁵ See, Syria Justice Archive on X: " 🇺🇦 scsv Field Execution of Sahnaya's Mayor The mayor of Sahnaya, Hussam Warwar, and his only son, Haider Warwar, were executed on the spot by firing squad, reportedly by #HTS militants. Hussam Warwar appeared just yesterday in the attached video (wearing a light blue shirt), <https://t.co/xHXLrPbnmn>" / X

“operatives” linked to attacks on Druze civilians outside of Damascus, to dissuade attacks against the Syrian Druze community.¹⁷⁶ Witnesses reported low flying Israeli aircraft.

6. Witnesses also reported that the forces that arrived were a mix of ISF and Syrian Arab Army forces, accompanied by tribal and irregular forces. Armed men marched through the streets of Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya chanting sectarian slogans during this time. A series of house raids also occurred, involving the killing of Druze civilians and looting.

7. In one such raid, on 30 April, a mixed group of foreign and Syrian fighters raided the home of former mayor.¹⁷⁷ They called his family members “pigs” and one of the armed men threatened to abduct a woman from the family. After a few hours in the home, where they stole cash and gold, they tied the hands of the former mayor and his adult son and took them away. Their bodies were found the next day.

8. In another raid on the same street, an unarmed elderly Druze Sheikh confronted armed men who were entering his elderly brother’s home, who was also a Sheikh, claiming that someone had opened fire therefrom. Following an exchange of words, they shot him three times on the street outside. Armed men then entered the brother’s home, called the family pigs, looted jewellery and then brought the brother away. His body was later found together with that of the former mayor and his son. On the same day, a teenage boy was shot in the back as he was fleeing, with the gold and cash he was carrying reportedly taken. Additional civilian deaths are under investigation.

9. Several Israeli strikes hit Damascus and rural Damascus between 30 April and 3 May, including a 2 May¹⁷⁸ strike on land just 400 meters from the presidential palace. After this much publicized strike, active operations ceased in Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya. At least 40 people including civilians were reportedly killed and government forces reported 11 casualties among its forces. Medical staff reported numerous injured fighters and civilians. Much of the Druze population was temporarily displaced. Over 100 Druze fighters and civilians were reportedly detained and eventually released with the last five reportedly freed in February 2026. One detainee remains unaccounted for.

10. Concurrently, a convoy of men from Suwayda sought to reach Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya to aid in defending the area and assist those fleeing on 30 April but was ambushed in the Brek area. Up to 48 people, likely fighters although sources differ on the military or civilian nature of parts of the convoy, were reportedly killed in connection with clashes following the ambush. Clashes then spread south to Sura al Kabira, the first large village in Suwayda governorate, reportedly resulting in the killing of dozens of Druze fighters.

11. Government forces, accompanied by tribal fighters, entered Sura al Kabira and set up checkpoints. Around 15 houses were reportedly set on fire, and two elderly people were killed, allegedly by neighbouring tribal fighters following the ambush in the Brek area. Several armed men stayed in the home of a Druze woman, whose husband had been detained, for three days. One of the men later came back and raped her. She also suffered sexual violence and threats, as did her daughter, and she required medical treatment in Suwayda due to her injuries.

¹⁷⁶ IDF War Diary, “During the day, the IDF attacked operatives on the outskirts of Damascus who attacked Druze civilians. The IDF is monitoring developments in Syria and the forces are deployed in readiness for defense and various scenarios,” available at <https://www.idf.il/%D7%90%D7%AA%D7%A8%D7%99-%D7%99%D7%97%D7%99%D7%93%D7%95%D7%AA/%D7%99%D7%95%D7%9E%D7%9F-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%9C%D7%97%D7%9E%D7%94/%D7%99%D7%95%D7%9E%D7%9F-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%9C%D7%97%D7%9E%D7%94-%D7%AA%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%A6%D7%91-%D7%9C%D7%90%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%9A-%D7%94%D7%99%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%9D/%D7%99%D7%95%D7%9E%D7%9F-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%9C%D7%97%D7%9E%D7%94-30-04-25/>. See also, <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/spoke-tariff020525>

¹⁷⁷ The use of the term “foreign fighter” is not meant to imply any designation under the United Nations Security Council resolution framework set out in its resolutions 2178 (2014) and 2396 (2017) which refers to the “foreign terrorist fighter” designation. In this report its use is only included as a descriptive term where witnesses and other information have pointed to the involvement of non-Syrian armed individuals operating as part of the Syrian state security forces or as members of other armed formations.

¹⁷⁸ https://x.com/UNEnvoySyria/status/1918582955934355613?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etwetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1918582955934355613%7Ctwgr%5E284caf1351b14b75df092c9ad66af91ad7b22414%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2F

12. Reportedly, half the population of Sura al Kabira fled after the violence, in which both the Druze majlis and the Christian church were looted and the majlis burnt, as was the home and grave of notorious Assad-era commander Issam Zahreddin located in the village.

13. An agreement was reached on 1 May between local communities and the government that reduced fighting and tensions in the area, yet without restoring calm fully.

B. Violence impacting civilians in Maqwas, Suwayda city, from June onwards

14. In the weeks following the events in Jaramana and Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya, Bedouin residents of mixed neighborhoods in Suwayda reported increasing tensions, with rumours of attacks on the Maqwas neighbourhood in the southern part of the city being planned. Periodic tit for tat abductions occurred into June and checkpoints were erected in different parts of the city by local SMCAGs, with Bedouins reporting an early June seven-day siege of Maqwas during which food and goods were blocked from entering the area, as tensions continued to rise. Amid these tensions, Bedouin and Druze community leaders met and maintained communications in attempts to minimize local escalation.

15. On the evening of 11 July, a vegetable merchant traveling on the Suwayda–Damascus highway toward Suwayda was stopped at the ISF-staffed Khirbat Al-Shayab checkpoint, about nine kilometers north of the Dar'a border and detained for three hours. After proceeding, he was stopped again 3–4 kilometers later by more than 15 armed men who blocked the road, robbed and beat him, threatened him with death, insulted him for his Druze faith, and accused him of militia involvement. Released early on 12 July, he returned to the same checkpoint, where he allegedly recognized some of his attackers among the staff.

16. The following day, on 12 July, Druze armed men from the Ariqa area abducted eight Bedouin men, including at least one person from Maqwas. The usual attempts to mediate release were unsuccessful, with intermediaries unable to influence the abductors. The following morning on 13 July, around 05.30 a.m., Bedouin men from Maqwas in turn abducted a group of 15 Druze men and their vehicles. Once again, local intermediaries engaged to seek the mutual release of captives, but armed actors on both sides appeared unwilling to allow traditional mediation efforts to resolve the issue.

17. By around 1.00 p.m., SMCAGs had surrounded the Maqwas neighbourhood as the negotiations for the release of the captives continued. One Druze armed group member was reportedly killed earlier in the day by Bedouin fighters. Though both sides dispute the exact trigger, by 1.00 p.m., shelling and 23mm anti-aircraft fire targeted Maqwas and Masad areas from two distinct locations held by SMCAGs. By 3.00 p.m., social media accounts associated with both Druze and Bedouin and tribal gatherings reported dozens of people killed and injured, including women and children. Multiple sources reported that the abduction issue had been on the verge of being resolved before the shelling began.

18. Though many of those killed and injured on 13 July had been directly participating in hostilities, during the shelling, women and children were also killed and injured. In one case, shelling impacted a Bedouin home injuring a woman, a boy, and a man. Ambulances could not reach the neighbourhood and the woman died the next day (while the boy and man were evacuated days later, after the entry of government forces). Other families also suffered casualties, also without access to ambulances.

19. Attacks on individuals in their homes also took place. A young man, who may have been engaged in the clashes, went outside of his home during a lull in the fighting and was shot in the legs, then surrounded by a group of dozens of armed Druze men who insulted him and accused him of shooting three Druze fighters. They raided his home, blowing open the door with a grenade and took the remaining family members, civilians, including women and children, to the home of a Druze person in another village. The fate of the injured man is unknown, though his name appeared on initial lists of reported detainees and the family received messages about him being ill-treated after he was taken. In another case, a group of Druze men entered the home of a Bedouin family, shot and killed one man, while four other family members' fates are unknown. Their names later appeared on lists of the dead compiled by neighbourhood representatives. During these attacks, multiple Bedouin witnesses reported that SMCAG members were wearing government ISF uniforms.

20. Bedouin civilians further recounted being shot at as they fled their homes seeking safer locations in the village, with one woman recalling how her son was grazed by a bullet while fleeing to a safer area on 13 July.

21. A Druze resident of Maqwas reported that a neighbour knocked on their door during the fighting on 13 July. While the door was being opened, three shots were fired into the home, killing one boy and injuring a man. Ambulances were unable to reach the injured.

22. As the hostilities increased, a series of calls went out online on 13 July for (tribal) mobilization ("*faz'a*"), to support the Bedouins of Maqwas. Similar calls for *faz'a* or mobilization went out on Druze social media posts.

23. Clashes then spread between Druze and Bedouin armed men to other areas, including Atil and Sura al-Kabira villages as well as the Haroobi area of the city, with tribal fighters from neighbouring Dar'a and southern rural Damascus also engaging, while fighting in Maqwas reduced in the evening of the 13th. At the same time, tribal fighters began advancing toward Suwayda from the north, entering the villages of Sura al-Kabira.

24. Some ISF units began mobilizing and entering mixed villages in the western part of the governorate (see next section), via Mazraa, Thaala, and Kanaker, while a larger mixed force of Syrian Arab Army and ISF forces was being readied for entry into Suwayda governorate. Clashes between ISF and tribal fighters were reported in at least one instance, allegedly after tribal fighters forced their way through a government checkpoint. Some local Druze residents and armed groups reportedly fought against the advancing forces.

25. Early on the morning of 14 July, around 02:00 a.m., the Bedouin and Druze captives abducted on the 12th and 13th were finally released through mediation between local political and religious leaders. Some tribal fighters withdrew from villages which were then retaken by SMCAGs, as for the case of Rijal Al Karama in Taara and Dor. Clashes continued however in other locations, in the northern part of the governorate, variously between SMCAGs and civilians who took up arms and either government forces, tribal fighters from outside the governorate, and local Bedouin groups.

26. Fighting ceased in Maqwas neighbourhood on 13 July around 8:00 p.m. and did not resume before the evening of 14 July, accompanied by house raids and looting, by SMCAGs. Druze residents of Maqwas were subsequently targeted in their homes and business on 15 July, with one man describing how a Bedouin neighbour asked him to come visit the damage to his own home but subsequently locked him inside another location. He then saw a group of armed men advance toward his home. Later, he was released and was stopped at an ISF checkpoint where he was beaten before fleeing to a relative's home. Later that evening, his relatives informed him that they had found the bodies of his wife and young adult son and daughter in his home, where he had last seen armed men approaching, with bullet wounds to the head.

27. After hearing that corridors for evacuation had been opened by government forces, some Bedouins, including some who had taken part into hostilities, managed to flee on the 15 July with civilian vehicles coming under fire. Two vehicles were fired on by armed Druze fighters, with one car with three civilian men flipped over after being fired upon. One of the occupants was killed instantly, while another man who had survived was shot repeatedly and killed. The armed group believed the third man was already dead and left him, but the man had survived and managed to flee. Government forces entered Maqwas later on the 15th, after which remaining Bedouin residents managed to flee. They remain displaced as of the preparation of this report.

C. Violence impacting civilians in Western and Northern villages of Suwayda governorate on 13-15 July

28. Civilians residing in villages of Suwayda governorate were subjected to waves of violent events between 12 and 20 July. The initial violence occurred between 12-13 July and involved clashes and attacks between tribal fighters from neighbouring governorates and Bedouin fighters from Suwayda on one side and SMCAGs and local Druze civilians who took up arms on the other.

29. The violence starting from 14-16 July onwards (referred to as the first wave in the body of this report), occurred as government forces and tribal fighters advanced through these areas towards Suwayda city, and ended when they largely withdrew from the affected villages by 17 July.¹⁷⁹ During this phase, interviewees reported heavy shelling and the use of tanks, armoured

¹⁷⁹ Witnesses and survivors reported different treatment during this period, with some force members and fighters notably more violent than others. While some force members facilitated the evacuation of injured civilians, or urged them to

personnel carriers, and vehicle mounted guns, with some of the forces carrying swords and some bearing insignia with the Shahada. The next wave of violence in these areas occurred between 17 and 19 July (referred to as the third wave in the body of the report), as tribal fighters entered the areas responding to the tribal leaders' calls for a general mobilization (see above report Section III, above). During this phase, some Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense forces shed their uniforms and entered Suwayda as part of the tribal mobilization.

30. The violence then culminated in the deliberate burning by tribal fighters of nearly every single home and building - not already been burnt - in 33 mixed or majority Druze western and northern villages starting on 18 July, that only ended after the ceasefire of 19 July was enforced (see above report Section III and the map Annex I).¹⁸⁰ Sporadic burning of structures continued in the government-controlled villages even after that.¹⁸¹

31. The impacted structures also included up to 82 Druze religious sites and six Christian churches, of which the Commission corroborated 15 and four, respectively (See Annex II, section I, below) on Religious Locations and Objects, below).

Violence in western villages

32. The violence in the area started on 13 July, when fighting between Bedouin and tribal fighters on one side, and SMCAGs on the other erupted in Tira. Bedouin and tribal fighters initially took control of Tira after clashing with local armed men and setting a number of homes on fire. After an agreement leading to the release of the abductees was reached, the Druze armed group Rijal al-Karama reported that it had retaken control of Al-Tira village in the early morning of the 14th.

33. Armed men wearing similar mixed uniforms also attacked Kanaker village further to the south, with local men defending the village against what they initially thought was another round of attacks by criminal gangs.

34. Hours later, government forces announced an operation to restore security (see report above, Section III). On the morning of 14 July, mixed ISF and Syrian Arab Army formations, accompanied by tribal fighters, entered Suwayda governorate from Busra Al Hareer area in Dar'a governorate to the west, crossing Taara, Dor, Najran, Dweri reaching Mazraa later in the afternoon, where Israeli airstrikes were reported, eventually establishing control over Mazraa in the evening. A group of similar composition advanced from Um Walad area with some moving northwest towards Thaala while other fighters headed west towards Kanaker, establishing control over both villages in the evening after heavy clashes caused casualties amongst government forces and Druze armed men. That same night, armed men with Syrian accents wearing a mix of camouflage and civilian clothes entered Walgha village, conducting house raids and setting some homes on fire.

35. While the forces entered without any opposition in some areas, they encountered armed resistance from SMCAGs or local men in several villages. Intense shelling and gunfire were reported.

36. Amidst these developments, an delegation from the Ministries of Defence and Interior led by the ISF operational commander sought to convene a meeting in Mazraa village on 14 July between senior government forces commanders and various Druze leaders aimed at paving the way for the entry of government forces with minimal violence. Aside from the owner of the guesthouse, none of the other invited Druze leaders attended, though phone calls took place.

37. It was not successful however as explained above, and clashes escalated with significant casualties for both government and SMCAGs (see report, Section III, above.).

flee, noting they could not guarantee safety, other mixed groups carried out horrific violence against civilians and looted and burned homes and other properties.

¹⁸⁰ In addition to the collection and verification of open-source material, the Commission conducted field visits in dozens of villages across northern and western rural Suwayda between September and December 2025. These visits confirmed the widespread destruction of civilian property by fire. To corroborate these findings, the Commission utilized data from NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System (FIRMS), part of the Earth Science Data and Information System (ESDIS) which supported the reported timing and geographic distribution of the fires in several locations <https://firms.modaps.eosdis.nasa.gov/map/#m:advanced;d:2025-07-13..2025-07-21;v:max;@36.45,33.05,9.82z>

¹⁸¹ UNOSAT Analysis, on file with the Commission, 26 December 2025.

38. The night of 14-15 July saw further clashes in Thaala and Kanaker, as local Druze armed men resisted the advances, while many women and children fled the area to Suwayda city.
39. In many cases, across western villages, the elderly, disabled, or ill stayed in their homes, along with many who believed that they had nothing to fear from government security forces. Following the collapse of defenses, government forces entered first, followed by tribal and local armed men who engaged in looting and in cases, killings and burning of homes. Eyewitnesses described home raids entailing threats, insults, and looting by groups of armed men, while treatment differed. Some fleeing residents recalled when they were leaving the area, ISF told them to keep moving out of town, while they were insulted and threatened by tribal fighters.
40. The forces that advanced from Um Walad were likely those that attacked Thaala to the north and Kanaker to the east before reaching Suwayda city's western perimeter. These forces comprised mixed groups of armed men, wearing black ISF uniforms, beige camouflage, green camouflage, and civilian clothing, with armored vehicles. Residents reported drones flying overhead and dropping explosives, in addition to mortar and artillery fire.
41. In one incident, recorded by the perpetrators in a video, armed men in beige uniforms and civilian clothing, including foreign soldiers, entered the guesthouse of an elderly Druze Sheikh in Thaala village in the morning of 15 July, beat him with rifles, insulted him, and recorded and disseminated the shaving of his moustache. They fired their weapons around him and he fainted.
42. The forces that deployed from Busra al-Harir, comprising mixed ISF, Syrian Arab Army and tribal fighters passed through Taara, Qarrasa, Dor, Najran, Samie, Mazraa, Majdal, Walgha and Rima Hazem on route to Suwayda.
43. In Dor and Tira, ISF, Syrian Arab Army, and tribal fighters entered on 14 July. Residents described groups of armed men in mixed clothing, camouflage, black ISF-type clothing, and civilian clothing, going door-to-door searching homes and threatening residents, and arresting some. Shelling and drone strikes on the village, killing and injuring civilians, prompted many residents to flee though some residents, in particular the elderly and those living with disabilities, stayed behind. In Dor, a group of armed men affiliated with government forces filmed themselves shaving the moustaches of three Druze men amid insults and threats. One resident also reported that ISF helped evacuate them outside the governorate later that day, saying "It's better for you to leave now. Some factions are not disciplined."
44. In Mazraa, government forces were present on 14 July with the accord of some local Druze factions for a meeting with Druze community leaders. By that evening, the situation deteriorated however and violent raids into homes began. In one case, a group of armed men raided a home, claiming to search for weapons, firing their own indiscriminately. One elderly man was shot in the stomach, and he and his family were then taken by ISF by car to a medical point, where they were transferred on to a hospital. The man died the next day of his injuries. In other instances, homes were raided and searched, but residents did not report specific violations.
45. In the next town along this axis, Walgha, displaced residents described similar scenes with artillery shelling and explosions and successive groups of armed men entering homes from 14 July onwards, questioning and threatening those that remained, and looting. The armed men would typically take the mobile phones of residents, ask for passwords to search them, and simply not return them, while asking whether there were any young men, weapons, or valuables. Groups of armed men were mixed, with some wearing ISF or Syrian Arab Army-like uniforms, and others civilian or mixed civilian-military clothes. As in other locations along this axis, treatment was not uniform.
46. In one case from Walgha, an interviewee recounted seeing multiple homes and businesses set on fire and having different groups of ISF and mixed armed groups enter their home where he had sheltered with his family, including children. The first group of armed actors examined their mobile phones and they were threatened with death, insulted, and beaten. The following day, another group detained him and four members of his extended family. They were beaten continuously during their transfer to Mazraa and then to Dar'a city where they were held in an ISF facility. He was released after approximately 70 days while the others remained in detention until early 2026.
47. Another interviewee described how he and his brother were shot as they were looking out the window in their home in Walgha on the evening of 14 July. When they attempted to reach the hospital in Suwayda, they were stopped at an ISF checkpoint and told that the road was closed

because of another group. By then, his brother had bled to death. He sought refuge at a cousin's home, where groups of armed men would come to question them every few hours. One of his nephews was detained and found dead outside. The following day, the remaining three men were detained and taken to Mazraa and then on to Dar'a where he received medical treatment before being held in multiple locations and released in mid-September. Some interviewees noted a difference between "fake General Security [ISF]" and "real General Security [ISF]" with marked differences in treatment between the two groups. It is unclear whether such distinction pertained to persons impersonating ISF or undisciplined ISF members.

Violence in the northern villages

48. Following the violence in Maqwas, one of the first areas to be affected by violence was Sura al Kabira, which was attacked by tribal fighters on 13 July, clashing with SMCAGs and pushing these further south to Hazm and Khalkhaleh. In Sura al Kabira, more homes and villages were set on fire, and the few residents who had remained from the April and May attacks (see report section III, above) fled south. As in other locations, some elderly and disabled civilians stayed behind.

49. After the announced Government operation on 14 July, ISF and Syrian Arab Army forces started entering also northern Suwayda countryside, using the Damascus-Suwayda highway, and the Druze forces withdrew further south. Reportedly, following a local agreement, government forces along with tribal fighters entered the northern villages from Sura al-Kabira to at least Sura al-Sughra without resistance as of 15 July, which may explain why this area saw less reports of violence impacting civilians than the western villages during this time. However, abductions by unknown actors were reported, including of a Druze husband, wife and young daughter who was allegedly abducted by Bedouin armed men around 14-15 July in Sura al-Saghira, subsequently released following negotiated exchanges, deeply traumatized by their ordeal.

D. Violence impacting civilians on 15-16 July following the entry of Government forces and tribal fighters into Suwayda city

50. ISF, Syrian Arab Army and tribal fighters entered Suwayda city on the morning 15 July. Many residents remained in their homes despite the sound of shelling and gunfire, assuming they would not be harmed. After hearing reports of killings civilians started to flee or seek shelter, or stayed hidden, unable to move freely, and without access to electricity, water and food due to hostilities. The disruption of mobile phones, internet and calls prevented people from receiving information about their loved ones and to accessing hospitals.

51. On 17 July, after government forces had withdrawn, residents found many bodies scattered in streets and houses.

52. Government forces with tribal fighters, entered the city through the Walgha, Thaala and Kanaker roads from the east, which converged in the centre of the city, as well as from the south (see report Section III above and map Annex I). The forces were equipped with tanks, armoured personnel carriers, pickup trucks with mounted weapons, and other weapons, including drones. The commission found remnants of mortars and bullets of various calibres, and rocket-propelled grenades in multiple locations in the city.

53. The Commission investigated 28 violent incidents that occurred on 15 and 16 July in Suwayda city, in which 97 civilians, including eight women and six children were killed.

54. Upon the entrance of government and tribal fighters into the city on 15 July and the following day, clashes with SMCAGs and civilians who took up arms and participated in hostilities occurred. In the cases documented by the commission, the victims were civilians taking no part in hostilities unless noted otherwise.

55. In the vast majority of incidents impacting civilians investigated in Suwayda city, the alleged perpetrators formed part of mixed forces comprising ISF and Syrian Arab Army members, often operating in groups alongside tribal or Bedouin fighters, both Syrian and foreign. Some wearing a mix of ISF and Syrian Arab Army uniforms, with or without insignia, other camouflage or military clothing in addition to civilian clothing, at times djellabas or traditional robes. Many wore masks, further hampering their identification. Some also carried swords, wore *Shahada* insignia or had red headbands.

56. All communities and civilians affected by violence in the incidents described in this section were Druze, except otherwise indicated. Druze men of military age were particularly subject to killings, indicating gender-specific targeting of men based on their perceived religious

or political affiliation. Children, women and elderly were however also killed in many instances. At checkpoints or during raids of residential buildings and homes, fighters typically searched for weapons, valuables and men, separating men from women and children, and asking civilians them about their sect. Those belonging to other sects were typically spared from physical violence or suffered less severe violations.

Violence against civilians at checkpoints

57. Several incidents occurred in which civilians were killed at *ad hoc* checkpoints established by the government forces and affiliated tribal fighters.

58. On 15 July around 09.00 a.m., members of the ISF and the Syrian Arab Army stopped a minivan carrying three Druze men, including an elderly man, by the Omran roundabout, close to a large military convoy included men a survivors identified as Bedouins. After firing in the air, two fighters, one wearing an ISF uniform and the other a camouflage Syrian Arab Army uniform, forcibly removed the occupants, confiscating their mobile phones, identification, and money. The elderly man was shot multiple times and killed. ISF members threatened to kill also the two younger men and took them to a commander by the side of the road where they were forced to lay on the ground. While there, they witnessed another civilian man forced to bark like a dog and having his moustache cut off by a man with a Bedouin accent. The two men were then released. Shortly afterward, a relative of the elderly man who was killed called his mobile phone. An unknown person answered and said: “we killed him, but we have spared the others”.

59. Similarly, ISF and Syrian Arab Army members stopped another civilian man in a car near the main street in Suwayda city on the morning of 15 July while a large group of government security personnel were present. They robbed him and forced him to the ground while a group of armed men hit and kicked him with their hands and rifles for 15 to 20 minutes. He was then transported out of Suwayda in an ISF vehicle and released in the afternoon following the decision by a man referred to as “sheikh”.

60. On the same day in the afternoon, a family of eight attempting to flee the city in two cars, including an older husband and wife, five young men and a 16-year-old boy, were stopped by ISF members near the modern hospital in eastern Suwayda city. An ISF member with a Dar’a accent asked the father if they were travelling together, before heading to the second car in which the six younger male family members were. One of them, a student, greeted the ISF member, who then suddenly stepped back and opened fire on the car, killing all five men and the boy. Then, ISF members violently extracted the bodies from the car and searched them, stealing wallets, money, mobile phones and an engagement ring. The parents fled after seeing their children shot.

61. In a widely reported case, the aid worker Hamza Al Amareen, operating on behalf of government-affiliated Syrian Civil Defense (SCD), went missing as he was conducting a humanitarian evacuation in Suwayda on 16 July near the Omran roundabout. According to SCD, he was driving a van marked with SCD-emblem, but communication with him was lost before he reached the evacuation location. Reportedly, a colleague called his phone the next day, which was answered by an unknown person who stated that Mr. Al Amareen was in good condition.¹⁸² The Commission could not independently confirm any information on his fate and whereabouts, though there were unconfirmed reports that he was being held by SMCAGs inside Suwayda.

Home raids in central Suwayda city

62. Government forces that entered from the Walgha and Thaala roads converged in the center of the city, where they conducted a series of house raids.

63. On 15 July, in the morning, a group of around 12 men wearing ISF and camouflage uniforms arrived at a family home in central Suwayda city, some with Idlib and Bedouin accents, with black patches displaying the Shahada on their uniforms where around 23 persons, men, women, children and elderly were sheltered.¹⁸³ Despite reassuring the family they would be safe, they forced the men to exit the house and line up against a wall, insulting them on sectarian grounds, beaten, and threatened with death and shot one in the leg. They proceeded to steal

¹⁸² [Statement on the Abduction of a White Helmets Emergency Response Center Manager in Suwayda While En Route to Evacuate a UN Team | the White Helmets](#)

¹⁸³ The Muslim profession of faith (‘there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah’). Black patches with the Shahada written in white is often associated with Da’esh fighters.

money, gold and car keys. They opened fire at the unarmed men, injuring four more of them, two of them severely. Those who could walk were ordered inside the home and told not to go back out. By the time the group of fighters left the area one hour later, the two severely injured men had died. Their bodies were brought inside the house, where they would be kept for 34 hours until the family buried them under the family home. In the meantime, the house was raided and threatened by several other groups of armed men, but no other family member was physically harmed.

64. Two hours later, at 11.00 a.m. a mixed group of at least five ISF and Syrian Arab Army members entered the ground floor of a house in the city center where a family along with several displaced persons from Mazraa were sheltering. Women and children gathered in the basement, while men were in the *madhafa* reception room on the ground floor. Survivors recounted inviting the armed men to enter and offering them coffee. The armed men asked if they were Druze. When they replied yes, the ISF and Syrian Arab Army members called them “*apostates*” and “*pigs*” and then shot at portraits of community leaders hung on the walls before two of them shot at the civilian men killing twelve and injuring at least ten. Survivors recounted that the apparent commander wore a mask and spoke with an Idlib accent, while others had foreign accents.

65. At almost the same time 500 meters to the south, two ISF members searched a home for weapons in a residential building, where an extended family had sheltered. They left without incident but were followed ten minutes later by another group of armed men. A male civilian who exited the building to speak to them was shot and killed, reportedly after he refused to kneel. Six of the man’s relatives, including four men and two women also who had also exited the building to see what was happening were similarly shot at close range, killing three men and a woman and injuring one woman and two men.

66. Also on 15 July, a nearby residential building where dozens of civilians had sheltered was raided several times by different government forces members who robbed residents of valuables, including an armed group composed of foreigners of Asian origin, who spoke broken Arabic. When told the had no valuables left during a later raid, one of the foreign men threatened to kill a boy, pointing a gun to his head and shouting that he would “slaughter” him unless more gold was handed over. They left after residents found some additional jewellery and gave it to him.

67. In the same area the following day, 16 July, ISF members and armed men in camouflage but without insignia, filmed themselves ordering three young men displaced from Mazraa village to throw themselves off a third-floor balcony. Three fighters in military uniforms but without visible insignia pointed their rifles at the three young men and ordered them to step out onto a balcony located on the third floor of a residential building. The fighters yelled “Go on! Throw yourself over, faster!” at their victims. Two of them then proceeded to shoot the men as, one by one, they climbed over the railing and fell, shouting “God is great” after the killings. An elder relative of the three men was also shot and killed in the flat. The person in the video that appears to direct the others has been identified and is reportedly an ISF member.¹⁸⁴

68. In the Tishreen roundabout area, shortly after 06.30 a.m. the same day, a group of about a dozen armed men in camouflage uniforms without insignia led by an ISF member shot through the door of a family villa and entered. They gathered the women in the house in a single room and forced the eight civilian men, including seven members of the family of a Suwayda notable, at gunpoint down the street to the nearby Tishreen roundabout. There they were lined up and executed at close range with AK-47-style rifles. The perpetrators filmed themselves marching the men down the road and killing the men. Several groups of Syrian Arab Army and ISF subsequently entered the villa, looting valuables, including money, gold and cars. The women would only learn about the massacre on 17 July after government forces withdrew, when the bodies of the eight men were retrieved on the square.

69. Later that same morning, another house in central Suwayda city, home to a couple and their two adult student sons, which had been repeatedly raided and looted since the day before, was set on fire by the attackers while the family remained inside. The youngest son recorded a video stating that his father had been executed, that he was trapped, and the house was on fire, calling for help. In it, he can be seen holding a rifle. Syrian Arab Army and ISF members were present near the house at the time of the and in a video related to this incident, at least one can be seen wearing a patch with the Shahada over an ISF uniform. A civilian interviewed by the

¹⁸⁴ The Syrian government, in its response of 17 March to the Commission’s draft report, stated that at least one of the perpetrators was arrested in relation to this event. The Commission is seeking further clarification in this regard. See Report, above, Section VI.

Commission in the area reported that residents retrieved four bodies from another nearby house on 17 July, explaining it had been used as a base and set on fire as they left.

70. Also, on 16 July near Suwayda city center, between 6-7.00 p.m., a group of Syrian Arab Army and ISF, some with insignia bearing the Syrian independence flag and other with patches with the Shahada, approached a guesthouse chanting “God is the greatest”. Inside, approximately 60 men, women and children were sheltering. As they approached, they threw grenades in the direction of two armed men on a rooftop opposite the guesthouse, killing them. Residents recalled later findings bodies, one with a gunshot to the head, and the other beheaded with his arms tied. They then entered the guesthouse where survivors recalled that one wore an ISF uniform and a badge marked “Division 54”, that they spoke Syrian Arabic, and some had long hair and beards. After fighters searched for but did not find weapons, they forced the men to exit the house. The women were insulted, beaten and made to hand over mobile phones and valuables. Once outside, the group insulted and beat the men with iron bars, forcibly shaved the moustaches of two elderly men, and then made the men stand against a wall. They then shot and killed 16 men, eight men from the guesthouse owner’s family and eight from five other families who had taken refuge there. A 14-year-old child was also abducted and taken to another location where he was beaten. As government forces withdrew overnight, he was able to flee that location and return to his family. CCTV video obtained showed armed men in Syrian Arab Army uniforms near the site shortly before the attack, including two individuals identified by survivors as being among the attackers.

Southeast Suwayda city

71. Government forces entered Suwayda city from the Western Kanaker axis on 15 July in the morning, and deployed fighters in a densely populated area in south-east Suwayda city.

72. At 09.30 a.m., at least five members of the Syrian Arab Army, some wearing masks and armed with rifles and at least one RPG entered a house in southeast Suwayda city. They separated the women and men, took four men and two boys to the courtyard, beat and humiliated them, by calling them “pigs” and forcing some to crawl, while filming the abuse. When the father brought out demanded valuables, one soldier threatened him at gunpoint. The father pushed away the gun and urged the others to flee. One of the boys then ran towards a soldier, begging him to spare his father. The soldiers however shot and killed the father, the two other men and the two boys, using AK-47-style rifles and an anti-tank automatic machine gun. Another man was injured in the arm but managed to flee. CCTV footage and physical evidence corroborated the events.

73. Around the same time in the Thawra area of the city after a Syrian Arab Army BMP-01 armoured personnel carrier fired into residential buildings (see below), Syrian Arab Army members reportedly shot randomly in the neighbourhood, and threw four hand grenades into an apartment building, which caught fire. Two soldiers captured a civilian man in the street, insulted him and forced him into the burning building. The attackers entered the house and opened fire, suggesting that those inside may have been shot before their bodies were burnt. The following day, on 17 July, two corpses were found within the house, burnt to the extent that the bones disintegrated into ashes. The body of another man was retrieved behind the house, displaying a severe head injury consistent with small arms fire. The house continued to burn for 12 hours.

Suwayda National Hospital

74. The Suwayda National Hospital was also heavily impacted by the hostilities while staff were coping with a large number of dead and injured civilians arriving at the hospital. On 15 July, the arrival of injured members of government forces under armed escort triggered a short exchange of fire within the hospital, reportedly between such forces and the hospital’s police section,¹⁸⁵ killing one Druze police officer and injuring at least one other. The next day, fighting around the hospital escalated, and it was hit by shelling, with water and electricity no longer functioning (see subsection on conduct of hostilities, below).

75. In the afternoon on 15 July, approximately 15 Syrian Arab Army and ISF members, including one wearing a patch with the Shahada on his uniform, entered the hospital. They gathered around 40 medical and administrative staff and forced them to kneel inside the entrance hall. One of the Syrian Arab Army soldiers singled out a hospital volunteer and accused him of having earlier denied medical care to an injured government forces member. After a brief scuffle, two Syrian Arab Army members shot the volunteer successively using a rifle and a pistol. The

¹⁸⁵ This was reportedly an official liaison office responsible for preparing reports regarding non-natural injuries and deaths

events were captured in CCTV footage. Government forces confiscated phones from patients and workers, stole valuables, destroyed CCTV systems, and threatened staff. An IT specialist was also shot and killed, reportedly after he refused to provide passwords for the CCTV archive.

76. Access to the hospital was interrupted by fighting and shelling as well as communications blackouts. After forcing hospital staff to open the rooftop access door at gunpoint, government forces positioned two snipers on the hospital rooftop. Several civilians as well as three medical professionals, including a female doctor, were reportedly killed as they sought medical care at the hospital. Medical workers reported that 368 bodies were taken to the hospital between 15 and 17 July and that several patients died as a result of the collapse of the hospital's ability to provide services, including due to being prevented from moving patients for care within the hospital. Pictures showing dozens of bodies piled up inside and near the hospital were circulated on the Internet, sometimes accompanied by false claims that all had been executed within the hospital.

Southern Suwayda city

77. In the southern areas, the Tarabei residential neighbourhood saw attacks against civilians occurring simultaneously to the military operations by government forces on 15 and 16 July. Shelling on 15 July pushed residents to either flee or seek shelter. Groups of armed men gathered in the fields on the eastern side of the neighbourhood, started shooting and shelling the area with mortars. Snipers were positioned on rooftops, while at least one tank was near the "Al Koum" roundabout, and a vehicle with a mounted 23mm gun was operating in the area.

78. On 16 July at dawn, a large group of Syrian Arab Army, ISF, and tribal fighters, deployed in the neighbourhood in small groups and started to raid homes.

79. At around this time, an unarmed civilian man was hit and injured by a sniper as he went to the rooftop of his building. The man's brother tried to take him for medical treatment but their bodies were found in their car following day. Authenticated images showed the bodies of two men laying down in a vehicle with open doors as if they had tried to exit the vehicle, displaying multiple wounds consistent with gunshots.

80. Between 08.00 a.m. and 09.00 a.m., two vehicles carrying women, children and elderly attempting to flee were hit by multiple gunshots near the Sahwa road. A girl hit in the head was killed instantly and two women who were injured died within 24 hours. A 13-year-old boy, an elderly woman, and a civilian man were also injured.

81. Likely later that same morning, two men were killed in an artist's workshop where they had sheltered. The artist had informed a relative by phone the day before that snipers were positioned on the roof of the same building and that on 16 July at dawn, ISF was raiding the building. Contact was then lost and on 17 July, the body of the artist was found in his workshop alongside the body of another man and the remains of the artist's dog. Authenticated footage from 17 July shows bodies of the two men lying in the workshop.

82. Also on 16 July, between 2.00 p.m. and 11.00 p.m., distinct groups of armed men raided a nearby home on the ground floor. After searching for weapons, the fighters threatened to kill the residents if they did not hand over all their belongings. As two women and a child were forced to the bathroom, the armed men shot the house owner, an older Druze sheikh in the corridor. Armed men dragged the injured man outside the house, and later shot him three more times. Residents remained trapped in the house as other armed groups came inside to loot until the evening. Local residents retrieved the body of the man in a yard near his house on 17 July. The Commission observed multiple bullet impacts to the house, including the entrance, corridor and living room, as well as where the body was located.

83. That same afternoon, around twelve fighters wearing military uniforms, some with patches with the Shahada and red bands, raided a house where a family of four including two children had sheltered. Four men shot at the door, entered and asked the family if they were military or civilians. After they responded they were unarmed civilians, the gunmen shouted, "you pigs, get out of the house!" However, one of the armed men said, "not these ones," referring to the woman and children. Attackers then dragged the man outside and shot him five times before leaving. The raid lasted only a few minutes. The body was retrieved in front of the house the next day on 17 July.

84. Also, on 16 July in the afternoon, a family composed of two couples and a child with down syndrome were sheltering from the hostilities inside their home located in the same area. They heard a group of armed men coming towards their house. The owner called out to signal the presence of civilians. One of the fighters then said, "there are people here," and the group

started to shoot at the house, killing him. A woman tried to escape with her son but was caught and forced to go back into the home. One of the armed men then radioed someone asking if he should kill a Druze woman he detained, however the person on the radio responded saying not to harm her. The woman's relative next tried to escape, but when the armed men saw him, they killed him in the garden. A Commission site visit confirmed multiple bullet impacts inside the house, consistent with the survivors' accounts.

85. At around 1 pm, a group of around 25 armed men wearing green camouflage uniforms approached a house where around 30 civilians were sheltering. Four religious Sheikhs from the same family exited the house to talk to them, but they were shot and killed and, the attackers left. During a site visit, the Commission documented bullet impacts and blood stains on the floor and up to the ceiling of the terrasse where the killings occurred, consistent with survivors' accounts.

86. The same group then raided other nearby buildings, including a flat located on the first floor where two couples and their children were hiding. He and the other man were dragged out of the flat and taken to a nearby parking lot and killed. A witness recounted finding their bodies, one with a gunshot to the head, while the other was killed with a knife or a sword.

87. Other civilians were shot in the street, including an older man who was shot by armed men who had gathered on the terrace of his house, eating grapes growing there. The armed men shot him at a distance of some ten meters, as the man was returning home on foot after checking on a neighbour.

88. On the same street that afternoon, a group of armed men in a pickup truck shot a young man from the neighbourhood after he told them he was unarmed. His mother who was just meters behind him, sat down on the street, and held him in her arms while he bled to death. On the same day, the body of an elderly man from the same family was reportedly found in the street near his house. One person who witnessed the retrieval of his body recalled that it was severely damaged, indicating the man had been shot before a vehicle drove over his body.

89. On the night of 16 July, to the south of Tarabei, armed men attacked a house where civilians were sheltering, and killed twelve civilians, including a man with a disability, his elderly wife, three other women, four other men – including a Christian pastor – and three children, including (a boy and two girls). The victims included family members from the area and displaced persons from Thaala. The attackers looted valuables and separated the men and women. The men were insulted, beaten, then shot at close range. The women were taken upstairs, forced to undress, spat at and then shot. Before exiting the house, the armed men had written the *Shahada* on the walls. The only survivor was a young woman who hid after she was injured during the attack. Photos from the next morning also corroborated the events.

Conduct of hostilities incidents in Suwayda city

90. Shelling impacting residential areas was reported as having started already on 15 July, affecting both civilians and civilian infrastructure. A resident told the Commission that a neighbour's house was hit several times, injuring a civilian. The following day a SARC warehouse near the Suwayda municipality building was hit by shelling, triggering a fire which reportedly resulted in the destruction of 20 tons of humanitarian supplies.

91. On 16 July at 11:30, shelling struck the cardiac intensive care unit of the Suwayda National Hospital, destroying medical infrastructure. The Commission documented damage consistent with gunfire and shrapnel, that had affected both the outside and the interior of the building, including shrapnel penetration and chipped concrete along walls and structural elements in office rooms and circulation areas. CCTV footage from the hospital posted on social media and authenticated by the Commission showed an injured man on a street adjacent to the hospital on 16 July around 11.00 a.m. A few minutes later, a tank can be seen deviating its trajectory to run over the man twice.

92. In the southern Thawra area of the city on 16 July, a unit of the Syrian Arab Army comprising one infantry fighting vehicle and at least one vehicle mounted with automatic gun deployed in a residential neighbourhood and opened fire. The infantry fighting vehicle, a BMP-01 APC fired several rounds into three different directions, causing heavy damage to three apartments located in adjacent buildings, destroying a balcony, with reports of two civilians killed in the attack. The Commission observed damage on those residential buildings consistent with impacts caused by 73mm smoothbore gun, commonly used in association with BMP-01 APCs.

93. Also on 16 July, a villa in central Suwayda city was hit by a rocket. A family of four fled to their basement shelter moments before a rocket impacted the villa.¹⁸⁶ Information during a site visit to the impacted building indicated the use of a small to medium unguided, solid-fuel rocket fitted with a high-explosive warhead, consistent with 122 mm ammunitions.¹⁸⁷ The family fled the city later the same day.

94. The tanks deployed into the city destroyed several cars that they had apparently run over even though the road would have been sufficiently wide to avoid that. Bodies were also run over although it was unclear by what kind of vehicle. Two burnt bodies were found in central Suwayda city in the vicinity of Suwayda cultural centre under a burnt car presumably set on fire after it rolled over the two men. A severely mutilated body was found in a nearby field, with residents suggesting that a military vehicle had rolled over the man's body.

E. Violence impacting civilians in Bedouin communities following the government forces formal withdrawal

95. Following the Israeli airstrikes on the Ministry of Defence and other targets in Damascus on 16 July, the interim government withdrew its forces from Suwayda city by the same evening.

96. Violence targeting Bedouin civilian communities then began. On 17 July, SMCAGs and other Druze armed men attacked Bedouin civilians across the governorate, including in Shahba, Um Elzaytun, Shaab, Kafr, Breika, Sahwet Balata, Barek, Harooba, Rajm Elzaytun, Al Mansoura and Amra.

Attacks on Bedouin communities in Shahba on 17 July

97. SMCAGs attacked Bedouin neighbourhoods in Um Elzaytun and Shahba on 17 July in the morning, before raiding the area, forcing civilians out of their homes and bringing them to makeshift detention facilities where at least 1,400 civilians were held before being forcibly displaced outside Suwayda.

98. On 17 July in the morning, hundreds of SMCAG fighters equipped with sniper rifles, pieces of artillery, including 23 calibre weapons mounted on trucks deployed to elevated positions around a residential area home to Bedouin communities. While the fighters told residents they were present to protect them, around 11.00 a.m. they started shelling and shooting at civilians' homes. Some receiving an order to evacuate their homes a short time before the shooting began, while others were caught seemingly unaware. They then ordered residents to leave the neighbourhood and started raiding houses. Civilians fled in a state of panic while some were escorted outside the neighbourhood by fighters.

99. The shooting and shelling lasted around two hours. At least thirteen civilians, including one elderly woman and three children were killed, while others were injured because of direct or indirect fire, as they attempted to flee.

100. They included a family of seven, comprising a six-year-old girl, a teenage girl and boy, three women, including the children's grandmother who was over 80 years old, and one man who were killed when they were fleeing the hostilities on foot from their house in the neighbourhood towards the Damascus-Suwayda highway. The sole survivor, a teenage girl severely injured by gunshots, described the event as an execution, in which the seven family members were all shot by Druze fighters from a distance of just a few meters. The perpetrators then approached the bodies to count how many they had killed, but without providing any assistance to the injured girl or retrieving the bodies. The girl was later brought to the hospital by Druze neighbours.

101. Around the same time, a young woman was killed nearby, hit in the neck by a projectile as she was assisting an elderly relative to flee. A couple and their two children were also hit nearby with 23mm projectiles and shrapnel, as they attempted to flee on foot towards the outskirts, killing a four-year-old boy and the woman, and injuring a six-year-old girl. The impact of the projectile severed the head the boy, which can be seen in widely circulated video footage showing the bodies of the boy and the woman. The father who had escaped during the attack

returned to rescue his daughter who suffered multiple shrapnel injuries and had been left for dead. He reported being beaten by armed men as he was providing assistance to his child.

102. The body of his wife was recovered and buried, however the body of the child was not returned to the family with intermediaries claiming it could not be located. The girl injured in the attack was transported by local Druze acquaintance of the family to Shahba National Hospital with the family's consent. While the family lost contact with the girl after her transfer to the hospital she was subsequently transferred to the mosque that was being used to detain Bedouins from Shahba and reunited with her father.

103. Two Bedouin brothers were killed, reportedly shot in the back. They had had been accused of killing and injuring SMCAG members when fighting one of the armed groups. Druze militia members brought the bodies of the two men, desecrated them and hung them from the feet, alongside the body of another unidentified person, over a large portal marking the Western entrance of Janeina village to the east of Suwayda city. Pictures of the bodies were circulated on social media, at least one with a Druze fighter posing with the bodies. The bodies remained hung for days, with attempts to retrieve them for burial unsuccessful.

104. Bodies of a dozen of those civilian victims were reportedly buried in two mass graves in the outskirts of their neighbourhood. The mortal remains of the boy whose head had been severed and those of the two men who had taken after they were killed and subsequently hanged at the entrance of Janeina village were not returned to their families.

Mass detention and subsequent displacement of civilians in Shahba and Um Elzaytun

105. Around 1,200 civilians from the Bedouin communities of Shahba and Um Elzaytun, including entire families comprising women, children, elderly and people with disabilities were held in the Shahba mosque from 17 July until 20 July, under guard by SMCAGs. Their phones were confiscated, and they were compelled to sleep on the floor and provided only minimal food and water. They were prevented from praying, subjected to intimidation and threats, and filmed by armed group members from outside Shahba. SMCAGs also used sound grenades near the mosque at night and opened fire within the mosque threatening to kill civilians.

106. It was reportedly local Druze leaders from Shahba that protected civilians from being further harmed by SMCAGs while inside the mosque. However, during the night of 19-20 July, the civilians were violently expelled by the SMCAGs, who also started fires next to the mosque to scare them. They were then transferred to a school where they were held for a further two days. The facility lacked access to sanitation and drinkable water, causing children to fall ill.

107. In the early hours of 24 July, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent transported the civilians held captive by buses from the school, under armed escort, through Walgha, and into Dar'a governorate, where they were handed over and placed in IDP shelters and informal settlement camps. Throughout their detention until their arrival in Dar'a, the families were not given any say regarding their destination.

108. In nearby Um Elzaytun, following attacks by SMCAGs in the morning of 17 July, an estimated one hundred Bedouin civilians – entire families with men, women and children - were similarly detained in a building housing a kindergarten, guarded by SMCAG members who threatened to execute them. They were held there for days, until hostilities in the area escalated which their armed guards left to participate in, allowing the families to escape the building on 19 July in the morning and then to flee the area on foot.

109. Several Bedouin civilians fleeing the hostilities in Um Elzaytun on foot on 19 July were then killed or injured, including a three-year-old girl who died after she was hit in the head by a projectile and a woman who died in a medical facility where she had been taken by SMCAG members after she was shot by a sniper. Cases of Bedouin civilians killed or injured while fleeing Um Elzaytun attacks include those of an elderly man, a woman and a girl, while a man with intellectual disabilities remains missing.

110. As reports of killings, injuries, abductions and mass detention of Bedouin civilians by SMCAGs started spreading, more Bedouin civilians fled their homes, villages and neighbourhoods. Over the course of a few weeks, Bedouin civilian residential areas located inside SMCAG-held Suwayda were largely emptied of their inhabitants (see map Annex I) as

civilians fled either by foot or in private vehicles or were transferred under armed guard or evacuated by humanitarian convoys outside the area controlled by the SMCAGs.¹⁸⁸

Other cases of deprivation of liberty, enforced disappearances

111. Other Bedouin civilians detained by SMCAGs including some injured during military operations, were held and interrogated in other facilities, where they were ill-treated and tortured. Those injured during the attacks on residential areas were transported to the Shahba hospital to receive health care services and subsequently transferred to other facilities.

112. A Bedouin from Um Elzaytun was beaten during arrest, on 17 July, and transferred to the State security branch in Shahba, and was held in a 3x3m room with six other detainees, their hands tied in the back. They would be routinely insulted, interrogated and beaten including with sticks and whips and received insufficient food and water. Two women were held in the facility.

113. Several detainees were released as part of a prisoner exchanges facilitated by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, from multiple locations including Um Elzaytun, Shahba, Berek, Raha, and Rima Hazem. Detainees were transported barefoot to buses, searched by SMCAG members, and transferred into Dar'a governorate between 25 and 27 July.

114. In Suwayda city, a Bedouin civilian was detained on 17 July by a SMCAG members accused of hiding a Bedouin man wanted by SMCAGs and providing support to government security forces. The civilian was taken along with his family, including women, to a facility in a remote location where men and women were held separately. All of their assets were stolen. The man, who was held in a solitary confinement cell, was beaten and interrogated, blindfolded, regarding his alleged support to government military operations. The civilian man and his family were eventually released in a prisoners' exchange after around three weeks and was then evacuated to Dar'a by SARC.

115. At least 18 Bedouins from Suwayda are believed to be detained as of the writing of this report, including at least three women, one boy and one girl.

Looting, burning, destruction and occupation of property

116. Displaced Bedouin residents also reported looting by Druze militias members both during and after their attack on Bedouin neighbourhoods. Most Bedouin civilians were forced to leave all their belongings behind when they fled, losing access to their homes, clothes and belongings, lands, shops, agricultural tools and machinery, and livestock. Their homes were also looted.

117. Many civilians detained inside the Shahba mosque, also reported being searched by members of Druze factions who stole their money and belongings

118. During site visits to neighbourhoods formerly inhabited by Bedouins including Shahba and the Maqwas and Haroobi areas of Suwayda city, the Commission noted that several houses were occupied, or, in the case of Maqwas, burnt. Several Bedouin survivors also reported that their homes or the homes of neighbours had either been set on fire or destroyed or were occupied by Druze IDPs after they fled.

Attacks against religious sites

¹⁸⁸ See [Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 3 - Escalation of Hostilities in As-Sweida Governorate \(as of 22 July 2025\)](#) | OCHA; [Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 4 - Escalation of Hostilities in As-Sweida Governorate \(as of 27 July 2025\)](#) | OCHA. On 25 and 26 July, the Syrian Civil Defence reported the evacuation of more than 3,200 people including 20 injured and 34 bodies facilitating the voluntary movement of civilians from Suwayda governorate through Busra Esh-Sham crossing in Dar'a governorate and facilitated the transport of around 366 people, primarily women and children who were trapped in Suwayda City.

¹⁸⁹ The corroborated Druze sites (all vandalized and burned unless otherwise noted) include Maqam of Al Khidr in Sawara Al Kabeera; Mazar Al Nabi Habeel (maqam) in Sawra Al Sagheera, Maqam of Prophet Sheeths in Dhakir, Maqam of Al Khidr in Najran, Maqam Mawlay al-Kalima in Mjeimir village (vandalized and damaged but not burnt), Mejlis of Majdal, Maqam of Prophet David in Majdal, Maqam of al-Khidr in the village of Labin, Maqam of Mazar Al Yasou' in Qarrasa, Mejlis of Rima Hazem, Maqam of Sayyidna Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Wahb Al-Qurashi in Sweimreh, Maqam Al Khidr in Khalkhaleh, Maqam of Al Khidr Abu Al Hool in Hazm village, Southern Religious Council (Mejlis) in Tarabei, and Maqam of al-Khidr in Sami. The corroborated Christian churches include Holy Cross Church in Taara, Mar Mikhail Church in Sura al Kabira, and Mar Poulus Church in Radimeh Ellewa were burned in addition to being looting and vandalized, while the Saidna Bishara Church in Mazraa was looted and vandalized.

119. Mosques in Suwayda city were also exposed to attacks conducted by SMCAGs, including during hostilities with government security forces and after the withdrawal of government armed forces.

120. Already between 13 and 15 July, the Al Noor Mosque in Haroobi, located in the immediate northern outskirts of Suwayda city was repeatedly shot at by SMCAGs, with damage visible in an authenticated video footage issued on social media on 16 July. Armed men would reportedly shoot at the mosque during the call for prayer. In a site visit to the mosque, the Commission documented bullet impacts on the mosque's minaret, as well as broken windows and other bullet impacts consistent with accounts provided by eyewitnesses. The mosque was also looted and further damaged after Sunni residents fled the area. The Maqwas mosque also displayed some damage from shooting during the Commission's site visit, but it was not possible to determine whether it was targeted or incidentally impacted during hostilities or when such damage occurred.

121. On 17 July between 10:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m., the great Mosque of Suwayda located in central Suwayda city was subjected to deliberate shooting by SMCAGs. Video footage showed a group of armed men repeatedly firing at the minaret with rifles and an automated gun mounted on a truck, as well as damages caused by firearms on the edifice. An eyewitness also reported the use of hand grenades in the attack. A group of armed men entered the mosque claiming to search for weapons and missing individuals, made derogatory statements about the Islamic faith. ISF members had used the mosque to pray in the preceding days and provided food to people sheltering in the mosque. Civilians, including Druze and Sunni, had reportedly found shelter in the mosque during the hostilities and were not harmed.

F. Violence against civilians during the tribal mobilization, 17-19 July

122. The third, and most destructive, wave of violence affecting Druze and mixed villages in western and northern Suwayda governorate and parts of Suwayda city, occurred between 17 and 19 July, as tribal fighters entered the areas responding to the tribal leaders' calls for a general mobilization.

Third wave of violence in the western villages

123. The violence culminated in the deliberate and widespread burning by tribal fighters of nearly every single home and building not already burnt in 35 mixed or majority Druze western and northern villages starting on 18 July, that only ended after the ceasefire of 19 July was enforced (see the above report Section III and the map Annex I). The impacted structures also included up to 82 Druze religious sites and 6 Christian churches, of which the Commission corroborated 15 and four, respectively (See Annex II, section I, below).¹⁸⁹ One government official asserted that "20,000 homes were burned" and urged the Commission to "see them personally."

124. In addition to the widespread looting and destruction, in many incidents civilians were insulted, threatened, injured or killed, often in the context of raids by groups of armed men.

125. An elderly woman from Thaala, described how on 17 and 18 July, a succession of groups of armed men entered her house, searched it, and sometimes insulted her and her elderly and unwell husband, calling them pigs and threatening to kill them. The first group arrived on 17 July in an ISF vehicle and informed them if they had any problems, they should call on them at the police station. The following groups were hostile, calling them "pigs" and threatening them, and looting valuables. On 18 July, a new group came and threatened them, with one asking,

¹⁸⁹ The corroborated Druze sites (all vandalized and burned unless otherwise noted) include Maqam of Al Khidr in Sawara Al Kabeera; Mazar Al Nabi Habeel (maqam) in Sawra Al Sagheera, Maqam of Prophet Sheeths in Dhakir, Maqam of Al Khidr in Najran, Maqam Mawlay al-Kalima in Mjeimir village (vandalized and damaged but not burnt), Mejlis of Majdal, Maqam of Prophet David in Majdal, Maqam of al-Khidr in the village of Labin, Maqam of Mazar Al Yasou' in Qarrasa, Mejlis of Rima Hazem, Maqam of Sayyidna Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Wahb Al-Qurashi in Sweimreh, Maqam Al Khidr in Khalkhaleh, Maqam of Al Khidr Abu Al Hool in Hazm village, Southern Religious Council (Mejlis) in Tarabei, and Maqam of al-Khidr in Sami. The corroborated Christian churches include Holy Cross Church in Taara, Mar Mikhail Church in Sura al Kabira, and Mar Poulus Church in Radimeh Ellewa were burned in addition to being looting and vandalized, while the Saidna Bishara Church in Mazraa was looted and vandalized.

“How do you want to die? Stabbed? Shot? As you want.” One group told them they were ordered to burn all the houses but refrained since they were present. That evening, the couple left the house and hid in the backyard. The following day, attackers threw grenades into each room. After two nights deprived of his medication and oxygen tank on which he was reliant, the elderly man’s health deteriorated. His wife had no choice but to leave him under the trees under a blanket and walked overnight to Suwayda city. The husband’s body was not recovered, although his blanket and personal effects were later found at the site.

126. Relatives of victims from Thaala reported a brief return to the village on 17 July, during which they recovered and buried the bodies of family members found in homes and on the streets. At least 38 people were reported missing from Thaala village. Some bodies were later identified, while ransoms were reportedly requested for others. At that point, looting of homes and vehicles had occurred, with limited burnings. Interviewees consistently indicated that systematic burning and looting took place after the formal withdrawal of government forces and the entry of tribal fighters. By the time of the Commission’s visit in September and October 2025, most structures and vehicles had been burned and ransacked.

127. One man who returned to Dor village found several bodies in the village, including the decapitated body of Sheikh Abu Mahmoud Shiya . The man then fled upon hearing that another attack was imminent, and saw his home burning from a distance.

128. Other civilians who returned on 17 July to Mazraa after government and tribal fighters withdrew also found bodies on the street and neighbours’ bodies in their homes as well as some homes and building looted and burnt, before fleeing anew.

129. The following day on 18 July, tribal fighters arrived and engaged in further looting, attacks on civilians, and burning of homes in Mazraa. One witness recounted being severely beaten in his home by tribal fighters along with his elderly father and adult brothers on the 18th. The elderly father had a stroke and died shortly afterwards, the surviving sons managed to flee.

130. Later in Mazraa, some ISF forces attempted, in vain, to stop or limit looting and burning of homes. Others recounted that ISF said it wasn’t their responsibility to stop the looting and destruction. During the Commission’s visits to Mazraa in September and October 2025, nearly every home and business in the village was burned and showed signs of looting. The Saidna Bishara Church had also been looted and vandalized but not burnt. The Commission also noted remnants of explosive ordinance and unexploded ordinance during brief visits to affected homes.

131. The Holy Cross Church in Taara was also looted, vandalized, and burned sometime between 14 and 20 July.

132. Similar patterns were also documented in Qarrasa, where a Druze shrine was also set ablaze, vandalized, and looted. The Commission conducted a site visit to the area in early October, confirming the destruction.

133. As for Walgha, when residents were able to briefly return on 17 July, they found family members’ and neighbours’ bodies in the streets and in their homes, with homes and properties looted and some burned. Residents also recounted that neighbours and family members were still missing or detained. Subsequent to the withdrawal of formal government forces, tribal fighters entered and systematically looted homes and set fire to nearly all homes and businesses in the village. The near-total burning of the village was documented by the Commission during its visit in October 2025.

134. The population of the neighbouring village of Rima Hazem recounted similar events, with initial incursions to the village accompanied by shelling, house searches, and burning of some homes on 13 July. Survivors described three separate groups, one composed of Bedouin and tribal fighters, one of foreign fighters who only spoke classical Arabic, and then ISF. They reported that the foreign fighters were the most violent, and ISF were polite but seemingly did nothing to stop the other groups. Some local men reportedly mounted a resistance, and at some point were said to be joined by members of SMCAGs. Some residents remained while others fled at the outset of the violence.

135. During a lull in fighting on 17 July, some residents returned to Rima Hazem to find homes looted, and some burned and damaged by shelling. The village then faced two more waves of violence. On 18 July, as fires burned in nearby villages, some fled while others remained, notably the elderly. That day, about a dozen armed men entered one home, fired shots, assaulted male family members, and abducted a 45-year-old man, who was later found dead with gunshot

wounds and reportedly buried in a mass grave after transfer to Suwayda National Hospital. At the same time, a neighbour was taken from his home, resisted, and was shot dead.

136. Violent home incursions occurred in Rima Hazem on 20 July, with one elderly Christian man killed in his home, having been violently beaten, and the property looted and damaged, with Christian imagery desecrated. Another Druze man, who had just returned to the village on 20 July to evacuate remaining family members, was shot in the head by a sniper. His body was later identified at the Suwayda national hospital.

137. Of note, the village of Aslaha, which had a Bedouin and Christian population, but no Druze inhabitants, was not subject to looting, burning or destruction.

Third wave of violence in the northern villages

138. Following the withdrawal of government forces, tribal fighters also arrived in northern Suwayda governorate, via the Damascus-Suwayda highway on 18 July. They reached as far south as Um Elzaytun as of 19 July, which remains at the frontline between government forces and the SNG as of the writing of this report. Many interviewees reported fleeing from the northern villages to the relative safety of Shahba during this period, though many civilians remained behind.

139. In Lahetheh, much of the population had remained until attacked by tribal fighters on 18 July. Some Druze fighters attempted a defense of the town while some of the population evacuated farther south. It was subsequently taken over by tribal fighters with home looted and burned. Some, including the elderly and disabled, were killed in their homes and their bodies burnt. One video circulated showing a Druze Sheikh who had already been shot dead being doused with petrol on the street, though it did not show the ignition of his corpse. Some residents managed to hide during the events and identified tribal fighters looting shops and threatening remaining civilians.

140. Later, some local residents reported sneaking back into the town, under government control, and captured videos and images of burned homes and bodies two months after the events. In one particular case, videos circulated on social media showing the remains of two elderly Druze residents and their disabled adult son, with the bodies partially burned, and requested that their remains be returned to their families. After this campaign, the bodies were transported to the Suwayda National Hospital, albeit with one body missing its head and another partial.

141. Rumours of a truce on 19 July prompted some Druze residents to attempt to return home to put out fires. In the case of one family from Sweimreh, one man and his adult son returned, but were captured and killed by tribal fighters on the same day.

142. Every village on the Damascus-Suwayda highway from Sura al Kabira to Um Elzaytun exhibited the same pattern of burning and evidence of looting of nearly every structure during the Commission's visits to the area between September and December 2025. The Mar Mikhail Church in Sura al Kabira and Mar Boulos Church in Radimeh Ellewa had also been looted, vandalized, and burned, as were Druze Majlis and Maqams in nearly every village on the northern axis.

143. In northern and western villages, the Commission documented widespread burning damage, small armed and medium weapons damage and unexploded ordinance. It has obtained reliable and verified images and video of burned bodies in homes and on streets, in western and northern villages, including information related to burned bodies brought to the Suwayda national hospital from the villages after the 19 July ceasefire.

144. Looting and pillaging of homes, including the stripping out of wires and other raw materials continued for months after the withdrawal of tribal fighters from the affected areas around 20 July, as did burning of certain locations. For instance, satellite imagery revealed a burning residence in Thaala village as late as 8 August.

145. Across both the northern and western villages of Suwayda governorate, residents reported missing and abducted family members and neighbours. Though some were later found dead, and others were found detained and released, many remain missing as of the tabling of this report. The few people who have remained have been largely isolated with limited services such as electricity, water, and telecommunications, and with restricted freedom of movement severely restricted due to the security environment. They have also been cut off from their usual economic

activities in Suwayda or from accessing their agricultural lands and are generally reliant on limited humanitarian aid.

Violence impacting civilians in Druze neighbourhoods of Suwayda city after the government forces' formal withdrawal

146. Violence by tribal, Bedouin and SMCAGs against civilians of other communities continued not only in rural Suwayda but also in the city, after the withdrawal of government forces.

147. On 19 July around 09.30 a.m., a flat near Omran roundabout was raided by several armed men from a tribe. Several civilians were present, including women and elderly persons. The attackers entered and shot inside the flat, looted property, and abducted four men. They took them to the nearby Omran square, where they were beaten and insulted by 15 armed men before being shot and killed at point-blank range. The attackers filmed the killings and shared it on social media. The Commission documented the use of large calibre bullets in the flats' living room and entrance with indications that the flat was also hit by gunshots emanating from outside the house. Subsequently, three women and three children, relatives of the executed men, were abducted by the same group, and handed over to other armed men who transferred them to Dar'a. One of the armed men appeared in a live television interview with the abductees, identifying himself as belonging to a Dar'a tribe, claiming the abductees were displaced civilians. All six abductees were released later the same day near Damascus.

148. In another case, on 19 July, armed men raided a house west of the city centre, where several families, including young children, were sheltering. Two armed men, one in camouflage and the other in a black ISF uniform, broke the back door and forced women to gather in a single room, before taking four men and two boys, aged 15 and 17, to the garden at gunpoint while calling them "pigs". Three other armed men, two in camouflage and another one wearing a traditional long robe and a black hat, were positioned outside. Women begged the attackers to leave the men and boys, but the attackers closed the door and started beating them. Soon after, the six were shot at close range in the garden. Later that day, another group of armed men entered the house and asked the women if there were any men in the house. After the women responded that they were all dead, one of the armed men stated, "You will leave with us, otherwise others will come and kill you". One of the women responded, "We will not leave, please kill us", but the armed men swore on the holy Koran they would not hurt them. As they exited the house, the women were first taken to see a man referred to as a "sheikh" at the Omran roundabout then to a medical facility in Izraa. They were briefly detained, before being moved to a private house, then transported to Damascus where they were released. A subsequent site visit found bullet casings and impacts in the house, and the men's burial site in the garden. Residents also reported that an 80-year-old woman who was alone was killed in an adjacent house.

149. On the same day in the evening, a woman displaced from the western part of the Omran roundabout neighbourhood was informed that their house had been set on fire earlier that day and that her 19-year-old son who had stayed in the house to protect the property had been killed. A video shows the young man surrounded by armed men - some in Syrian Arab Army-like green camouflage fatigues, one in traditional Bedouin clothing with a sword tied to his back - cutting the teenager's moustache with scissors. The next day, the teenager's body was found by residents in the house, burnt and without the head. A picture showing the man's severed head was subsequently posted on social media, along with the false claim that the body belonged to a tribe member beheaded by SMCAGs.

150. Many other homes in residential areas were also burnt during this phase. In the Omran roundabout neighbourhood, a former teacher described how he and his family fled the area on 17 July after their home had been raided and looted four times by armed men including foreigners identified by one of the attackers as their "Uighur brothers", who also insulted and threatened the family. After they left, the apartment they had lived in for 35 years was set on fire, destroying a library and poetry collection and leaving the family displaced, destitute and deeply traumatized.

G. Violence against civilians in Bedouin communities in southern and southwest villages of Suwayda from 16 July onwards

151. In the southern mixed villages, which remained under SMCAGs control, the dynamics followed a similar pattern to the events in Shahba, above, with SMCAGs launching direct and indiscriminate attacks against Bedouin communities on 16 July, following massacres in Suwayda city, along with subsequent looting and occupation of homes.

152. The area includes villages that have been mixed for generations. Interviewees, including women in particular, described close and good relations with their Druze or Bedouin neighbours prior the crisis, with children playing together and going to the same schools and long-standing commercial and customer relations. Many expressed their shock and surprise when Druze factions attacked, looted and burnt their homes and neighborhoods, even Druze faction members they know well and by name, from countless neighbourly interactions in the past.

153. Neighbourly relations had started becoming more tense since the fall of the Assad-led government. The resentment some Druze neighbours held towards the new government was occasionally being expressed through insults and threats towards Bedouin families, and the area saw increasing militarization. Druze neighbours would start practicing militarily in the hills surrounding their villages, starting in early spring of 2025, and Druze who had previously served in Assad-led government forces joined Druze factions affiliated with Sheikh al-Hijri after the fall of the former government.

154. Checkpoints were established by increasingly active Druze-led armed groups, with intimidation of Bedouin people increasing, and restrictions on movements, curfews. Despite this, neighbourly relations between local communities remained good until the last moment, with Druze and Bedouin residents reporting that they were having coffee together just days before the events. Both Druze and Bedouin families in the southern villages also recounted hosting Druze who had fled the violence in Suwayda city on 14-15 July.

155. The wave of violence against civilians in this area started on 16 July, when a group of young Bedouin shepherds were ambushed and killed early in the morning, including two boys, aged 16 and 17, and two young men. When the father of one of the victims heard about the event, he went with his 14-year-old son to retrieve the bodies and both were also killed. This was then followed by an attack on Sahwet Balata by SMCAGs from the east commencing around 09.00 a.m. There were no reported military positions in the village at that time. Later, around 12.00 p.m., government forces approached hitting one vehicle full of civilians with a shell, resulting in multiple deaths. Bedouin families then evacuated women and children to the west, with the last Bedouin inhabitants fleeing with Syrian Arab Army forces as they withdrew. Civilian casualties were reported among both the Bedouin and Druze communities and remain under investigation.

156. Neighbouring Kafr village remained under SMCAGs control, with Bedouin residents trapped inside their homes and subjected to searches by armed group members. After around ten days, some fled on foot, while others stayed for some ten days more under siege until they could be evacuated under SARC supervision, following an agreement between the SMCAGs leadership and the government. Despite the agreements to evacuate them, there were credible reports that armed groups robbed departing Bedouins of vehicles and livestock as they departed, with one witness being told by an armed group member, *“You leave with your lives, that’s enough.”*

157. In the village of Mansoura, located on the western outskirts of Suwayda city, Bedouin residents recounted how SMCAGs established military positions starting on 11 and 12 July, after which they could not leave their homes due to hostilities, including a reported Israeli airstrike that damaged some homes and the road. They remained in their homes until the withdrawal of the military, and then fled from the village under fire, with at least one civilian young man shot and injured in his home.

158. As in the Bedouin neighbourhoods of Suwayda city and Shahba to the north (see section E, above) by the time fighting subsided, the Bedouin populations of the villages of Sahwet Balata, Mansoura, Ora, Kafr, Qurayya, Rassas, Mjeimer and other villages under SMCAGs control in the area to the west and south of the city had fled, either during fighting or during subsequent evacuations, resulting in displacement of almost all Bedouins in SMCAGs - controlled territory in the governorate (see map in Annex I).

159. Bedouin civilians described a range of experiences during their flight from these villages. Some fled on foot, even barefoot, the majority unable to bring any belongings but the clothes they were wearing. Interviewed women recalled carrying solely their children, amid shells and bullets that injured several women and children. Others fled in their own vehicles, sometimes escorted, or in convoys facilitated by humanitarian groups.

160. At the time of their interviews, many lived in makeshift IDP camps, with simple tents in the middle of the desert, far away from any schools, health care or water sources. Many despaired at the loss of homes, gardens and apple orchards that they had painstakingly built and tended for

generations, most of which had since been looted, damaged, or occupied. At the same time, long-standing ties across communities were still intact, as illustrated by one Bedouin woman describing a Druze woman neighbour's efforts to help secure her families' clothes and belongings, keeping their phone conversations secret to avoid trouble from male relatives now opposed to such friendships.

H. Attacks on physical integrity in May and from 13 July onwards

Arbitrary detention, abduction and the missing

161. Hundreds of civilians were exposed to arbitrary detention or abduction at the hands of government forces, tribal fighters or SMCAGs during the July escalation in Suwayda. Arrests and abductions were carried out during and in the aftermath of military operations, targeting people on the move or people sheltering in homes or residential buildings, which were exposed to multiple raids by armed factions and associated violations, including looting, torture and killing, as described in above sections IV and V.

162. The total number of civilians who were, at any point in time, abducted or arrested in Suwayda from 13-20 July is unknown but likely in the thousands across all communities. Many releases have occurred since then, often in mutually agreed exchanges following negotiation and mediation involving multiple actors ranging from local Druze and Bedouin community leaders to humanitarian organizations, like SARC and the ICRC. As for persons still believed to be held, many were reluctant to speak of them in any detail, fearing any move that might negatively impact the chance of freeing such persons.

163. As for detention by government security forces, around 110 detainees from Suwayda were reportedly held in Adra central prison in September according to a former detainee. By October, half had been released unilaterally by the authorities in at least two batches, including some who were infirm and those over 65. More were unilaterally released over the ensuing weeks, including two minors who were reported released in December. During a Commission field visit to Damascus in mid-December 2025, the head of the central prison administration stated that 69 detainees from Suwayda remained held there, adding that around half of these cases pertain to criminal cases unrelated to the July events.

164. As for detention by the main Druze Hijri-affiliated armed factions, the National Guard similarly acknowledged holding around 30 alleged fighters in a former hotel in Suwayda city. During its visits to the city, the Commission sought but had not been granted access to the detention location. The remaining detainees were reportedly released as this report was being finalized in February 2026.

165. As for abductions by Bedouin and tribal fighters or other Druze fighters, the Commission is not able to confirm the precise number of people abducted and subsequently released. NGO reports indicated that around 130 persons may have been kidnapped in Suwayda city and countryside in July, with reports of releases continuously received until December 2025 inclusive.

Conditions and patterns during arrest and detention

166. Many documented arrests by government forces of civilians were carried out in an arbitrary fashion, often seemingly driven by discrimination, with frequent references to detainees' sectarian identity accompanied with insults and derogatory remarks directed at the Druze faith. Both arrests and releases occurred without detainees being presented before any legally competent authority; detainees were not informed of their rights and charges faced upon arrest, and releases frequently occurred in exchange for prisoners held by SMCAGs, including in July, August, September, and October 2025 and February 2026.

167. Pecuniary gains also seemed to be an underlying motivation. Many civilians, including older people, women and children, were detained from their homes by government force members who simultaneously engaged in looting and theft of the detainees' personal belongings. Similarly, abductions by tribal fighters or Druze faction members were also motivated by pecuniary gains, with several families of missing persons reporting that they received calls, often from the mobile phones of their loved ones, demanding ransoms for the release, indicative of their frequently reported involvement with criminal activities and criminal armed gangs.

168. The Commission interviewed several detainees released from government custody, who described having been held in several different detention facilities, being transferred from one to another, including buildings described as former government intelligence branch premises, military police premises, hospitals, and Adra Central Prison. In many cases, detainees first held in Dar'a were ultimately transferred to Adra Central Prison in Damascus, before their release.

169. Released detainees described being denied the ability to contact legal counsel or family members, though access to phone or other communication possibilities was subsequently granted within official detention facilities like Adra Central Prison. Such restrictions increased concerns among families that some of their loved ones who went missing during the July events might still be held incommunicado by the Syrian authorities.

170. The families of three Druze students detained in the vicinity of Shahba on 19 July, by armed men they described as ISF members, received messages emanating from the mobile phones of their relatives, including photos and videos showing them in captivity, demanding payment of ransoms for their release. Despite their families having paid multiple ransoms to the abductors, the three men were not released. Instead, a video released on social media in early August showed the three men on the ground with their shorts over their heads and surrounded by armed men, labelling them as newly arrested SMCAGs. In December, families were informed by third party that the three civilians were held in Adra, however families were not able to obtain confirmation by the administration.

171. In Adra prison, detainees from Suwayda were held in a single wing without segregated spaces for minors and adults. A detention survivor said he was detained as part of a group of 110 Druze civilians in Adra which included a man with Down syndrome, a person with disability, and minors. While survivors interviewed by the Commission stated they were initially unable to make contact with families or seek legal counsel in Adra, such contact was facilitated subsequently. One released detainee for instance reported being allowed to make a phone call a few days before his release.

172. Several released individuals reported that themselves or fellow detainees had been subjected to torture, either in connection with their capture by unidentified armed men or while in government custody, including through beatings with hands, pipes, and other objects as well as being subjected to threats and insults. A civilian held successively in the Military Police and in an ISF facility in Dar'a reported severe beating with sticks, cables and hands upon their arrival to the Military Police. Their treatment subsequently improved, with detainees being allowed to contact their relatives and provided with sufficient food and water, despite being held in a confined space with many others. In several cases though, detainees also described humiliating practices, such as forcibly shaving beards or moustaches. One detainee stated that he had been compelled to sign documents he was not allowed to read, suggesting a coerced confession.

173. In one case, a civilian detained by ISF members on 14 July in a Western Suwayda village was held around two weeks in a detention facility in Dar'a city associated to the Political Security branch of the former government. The man, who was held in a small underground cell with other civilians, described how fellow detainees were routinely exposed to various forms of violence, including beating with a plastic stick and other items for five days in a row and being constantly exposed to insults and humiliation, including forced moustache shaving. His body was covered with bruises when he was released.

174. Similarly, a civilian detained by ISF elements in western Suwayda on 15 July was also transferred to a detention facility in Dar'a formerly associated with the previous government's Military Security branch, alongside around 40 other civilians, including minors. Upon arrival, detainees were handcuffed, placed on the floor to be beaten and whipped, with the civilian reporting his back was strained with blood.

175. In another case, a civilian with a prior disability and partial paralysis was detained on 16 July by the ISF in Suwayda city, after being heavily beaten and shot in the leg during a raid on his home. The man received health care in a medical facility in Dar'a where he was held alongside around twenty civilians taken in Suwayda, including women and elders. He reported first receiving death threats by Bedouin fighters alongside some ISF members within the hospital, but that the medical personnel and other local ISF from Dar'a protected him from being harmed, until he was eventually released in a prisoner exchange.

176. The Commission also received reports of death in detention in the custody of the government. In one investigated case, several residents of a village in western Suwayda were

detained by ISF members on 14 July following the entry of government forces in the village. A relative of one of the detainees was informed by ISF personnel that the detainee had been transferred to an ISF facility in Izraa for investigation, which was confirmed by the detainee in a call to his family that same evening. About twenty days later, the family identified their missing relative as the Ministry of Health-run Identification Center in Damascus circulated the photograph of a deceased man indicating that the body arrived from Izraa and had been buried in Najha.

177. The Commission also interviewed released detainees who had been held by SMCAGs. They included Bedouin civilians from among the estimated 1,300 people detained in Shahba and Um Elzaytun who described beatings, humiliating acts, looting, lack of food and water and denial of medical care (see details in Annex II, section E, above).

178. They also included detainees – both Bedouins from Shahba and Druze of non-SMCAG-aligned factions – who had been held in a facility located in a SMCAGs “Operation Room” in Suwayda city on 17 July. They reported being exposed to and witnessing torture, as well as not being provided with sufficient food and water.

179. Multiple other reports of civilians being subjected to torture and ill-treatment while being held by SMCAGs, as well as deaths in detention. One young man who had been shot in the leg after stepping outside his home was later seen in videos being tortured while in custody; he remains missing. A Bedouin internally displaced family that fled Qasr village in northeast Suwayda reported that their son was abducted in Qanawat by SMCAG, one of whom later informed the family via text message that their son had been killed. Separately, a young man from Shahba described how SMCAGs attacked his home on 17 July 2025, during which family members were detained, beaten and shot, including his disabled brother who uses a wheelchair.

Rape and other forms of sexual violence

180. Several women and girls were subjected to sexual violence. Conduct amounting to sexual violence documented include rape, threats of rape; forced nudity and unjustified and disproportionately invasive body searches of women and girls. The Commission also received a credible report of sexual violence against men, which remains under investigation.

Information provided by medical practitioners

181. Medical practitioners involved in the emergency response to the armed violence in Suwayda attested to having treated victims of sexual violence, including rape, in the context of the conflict.

182. One medical doctor described treating a woman in her thirties from Suwayda. She suffered from a bad infection in her cervix and recounted that she had been raped. Most of her other family members were killed.

183. A medical doctor reported that a Druze woman, a mother of three in her thirties, had become pregnant as a consequence of rape, constituting forced pregnancy as a matter of international law. The perpetrator was not identified.

Rape

184. The Commission also investigated the case of rape of a minor Druze girl in Suwayda. The girl was trapped in a house for two days with her mother and extended family during military incursions, as various armed actors entered the house, searched the premises, stole valuables and threatened family members. In the morning of 16 July, a group of three fighters entered the house. One was described by the girl as light-skinned, Asian looking, a second spoke with a foreign accent, and a third man appeared to be of Syrian origin. The men subjected her to rape and other sexual violence. Shortly after, an officer entered the house and ordered the men to stop. Medical and other information corroborated the incident.

Invasive searches of women and forced nudity

185. The Commission also investigated two instances of forced nudity and invasive unjustified body searches of women, in the context of armed personnel searching houses and looting property.

186. Both occurred on 16 July in Suwayda city. In the first case, in the morning of 16 July, five armed personnel wearing olive green military and camouflage uniforms, and speaking in broken Arabic, entered a house near Al-Omran roundabout in Suwayda city. One of the fighters searched five women, touching their breasts and private parts under the pretext of looking for valuables

hidden in their clothes. All five women in the same apartment were searched in the same manner, according to an eyewitness, who was also herself searched.

187. In second case, from 16 July in the evening, a woman recounted how several women of her family were forced to undress by armed actors who entered their house, and who later shot them (see above, Annex II, section D).

Abduction of women

188. Many women were reportedly abducted or detained and, in most cases, subsequently released, with fifteen such abduction cases including eleven Druze women and four girls and four women and three girls from the Bedouin community documented by the Commission. For instance, an older Druze woman was reportedly abducted from her home in Majdal between 13 and 16 July by three unidentified armed men. She was taken to Dar'a and held for approximately two weeks before being released in Jaramana. In another case, three women reportedly kidnapped in Thaalaa mid-July by unidentified armed men were released by ISF on 20 November following a raid on the building they were being held in Musayfreh village in Dar'a.

189. In one emblematic incident, a Druze extended family was trapped at home in a village in Northern Suwayda countryside as a large group of armed men wearing a mix of civilian clothes and military uniforms, with several wearing an ISF uniform including one with a red band, stormed the neighbourhood on 18 July at dawn. The family members were shot at after one male family member shot back, armed men shot the civilians at close range, killing a woman and two men. The surviving two women and three children were abducted and handed over to two armed men who filmed themselves with the captives, falsely presenting them as victims of Druze militias. The following day, the abductees were transferred to a house in another governorate in a convoy that crossed several ISF checkpoints. Despite shrapnel injuries sustained by several abductees during the attack, captors refused to take them to a medical facility. Instead, they provided superficial treatment, leaving shrapnel in their bodies. They were repeatedly insulted on sectarian grounds and threatened by captors, who claimed to be affiliated to Da'esh. One woman was compelled to perform cleaning tasks despite her medical condition. Abductees were eventually released in a prisoner exchange involving ISF and SMCAGs in late July. One of the captors was an influencer who was subsequently detained by the government, and reportedly released on the basis of presidential amnesty decree (39) issued in February 2026.¹⁹⁰

190. In another case on 18 July, two Druze women were abducted at gunpoint from their home in a village in Western Suwayda countryside by armed men who according to the survivors, were impersonating ISF personnel. They were taken first to a private home in Dar'a, and were told they would be used as bargaining chips to secure the release of young men detained by Druze militias. The women were eventually released by ISF, transferred to an ISF detention facility in Dar'a and released in Damascus approximately five days after their abduction.

191. In the weeks and months that immediately followed the violent events, up to 105 Druze women were reported missing.¹⁹¹ Several reported missing women were later confirmed to have been killed as bodies were recovered. In one such case, the family of an elderly woman from Thaalaa with whom they had lost contact on 17 July, identified her body in November after it was retrieved and transferred to Suwayda National Hospital. In another, an elderly couple from Thaalaa who had been missing since 13 July, were confirmed dead in November after the release of civilians who had been abducted but had seen their bodies. The government-run Identification Center subsequently contacted the family to inform them that their female relative had been buried in Najha in Damascus. In most reported cases, however, the women were later found safe after the above-mentioned communication outages that had made it difficult to reach them ended. At the time of writing, the Commission is aware of three cases in which Druze women initially reported missing remain unaccounted for, as well as three Bedouin women and one girl reportedly held by SMCAGs.

Barriers to documentation of sexual violence

192. Barriers to documentation of rape and sexual violence remained significant throughout the investigation, owing to ubiquitous and deep-rooted cultural or religious concepts of honour, shame, and the resulting stigmatization of survivors of all forms of sexual violence. Survivors of

¹⁹⁰ <https://x.com/AlekhbariahSY/status/1975237400377925977?s=20> see also <https://sana.sy/locals/2410254/>

¹⁹¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/08/syria-un-experts-alarmed-attacks-druze-communities-including-sexual-violence>

sexual violence often hesitate to speak publicly or to have their ordeal documented, or even to talk to close relatives about their experience. For many, the deep and enduring trauma of their experience often means that it can take years before they decide to speak of the violations they survived. The prevalence of sexual violence was not possible to establish at the time of writing given such barriers.

193. The Commission also received reports of honour killings in this context, although no such cases were documented as of the preparation of this report. Displaced women also cited fear of honour killings as a reason not to return to their homes.

194. As previously seen during the conflict in Syria, stigmatization of victims often extended beyond those who were subjected to sexual violence. In particular, women who have been deprived of their liberty for shorter or longer periods, are routinely assumed by their own community to have undergone rape or sexual violence, and similar to those who were actually subjected to rape, suffer equally from stigmatization. During the July events, a high number of women and girls, both from Druze and Bedouin areas, were unlawfully deprived of their liberty and taken hostage. Rather than serving any military purpose, their deprivation of liberty was instrumentalized as a bargaining chip to secure exchanges and releases of fighters and civilians captured by the adversary.

195. For many of these women and girls, the impact of their deprivation of liberty far outlasts the duration of their abduction. In one case, a woman from Suwayda who had returned safely from abduction and to her family, reportedly started receiving questions from relatives afterwards, asking her whether she was going to undergo surgery, assuming she had been raped. Fearing the shame, she no longer felt comfortable living with her relatives and instead opted to move to a temporary shelter for IDPs. Another woman was publicly identified as a rape survivor but had in fact not been subjected to rape. She expressed despair at being labelled as such by the community, after incorrect news of her experience was widely disseminated on social media.

I. Property-related violations in May and from 13 July onwards

Looting and Arson

196. Most areas that came under the control of government forces and tribal fighters after 14 July were subjected to widespread looting and theft, much of it under direct threat or the application of violence to victims. Burning of homes and businesses took place in all areas, including in Suwayda city, while in Druze majority villages, in the northern and southern areas of the governorate, entire villages were systematically looted and buildings were burned between 14 and 19 July, though burning and looting continued for months after. The systematic burning of nearly every standing structure in northern and western villages took place between 17 and 20 July during the entry of tribal fighters. The latest reported burnings of locations in the western villages under government control prior to the finalisation of this report for example occurred in December 2025.

197. Displaced Bedouin communities also reported that their homes had been looted, along with cash, gold and valuables, and their livestock, vehicles, and farm equipment was stolen. Several Bedouin homes were burned or destroyed, while the vast majority of homes of displaced Bedouins in Shahba and Suwayda city were instead seized and occupied, in some cases by members of SMCAGs. In many cases this happened at gunpoint amid threats, insults and violence. In other cases, they were informed of the looting, burning and destruction subsequent to their flight, by Druze friends and neighbours with whom they maintained contact.

198. In Suwayda city and the northern and western villages, looting was systematically carried out by government forces and tribal fighters as they progressed. The Commission collected accounts of looting from displaced residents of nearly every village in the northern and western axis as well as locations across Suwayda city, including Masakin Al Khodr, the Omran roundabout, Suwayda main street, Mahdia, the electric market, as well as Tarabei neighbourhood. Theft occurred at checkpoints, within houses during raids allegedly aimed at searching for weapons and combatants, as well as in shopping areas. For instance, commercial shops in the main street were entirely looted on 15 and 16 July. This includes the “gold market” and several mobile and electronic shops. CCTV collected and authenticated by the Commission during a site visit showed several groups of armed men successively stealing assets, including

individuals wearing uniforms consistent with those in use by the Syrian Arab Army's Military Police, as well as others wearing civilian clothes.

199. In the case of raids on homes where the occupants were present, most interviewees described multiple groups of armed men entering repeatedly, in some cases hourly, successively threatening the occupants to hand over cash, gold, jewellery, mobile phones, and vehicle keys so they could steal cars and motorcycles. In some cases, the groups would ask for the items to be brought to them, while in other cases they would search the homes, sometimes claiming to be searching for weapons or men of fighting age. Home raids were typically accompanied by threats and sectarian insults, and in many cases shooting inside the homes, beatings and killings. Many interviewees recounted telling groups arriving later in the events that they had already given everything to earlier groups, which often prompted further threats and insults. Wealthy families were particularly targeted.

200. In some instances, in the western villages, witnesses described ISF and Syrian Arab Army forces searching homes for weapons and leaving without looting after declaring the houses cleared. A few recounted that ISF left a phone number to call in case they faced any challenges or provided a slip of paper indicating that the house was cleared. This did not have any effect though as subsequent groups of fighters stole mobile phones, ignoring or in some cases even stealing such papers where contact details had been written.

201. In cases where the occupants were not at home, residents recounted discovering their homes and businesses ransacked with valuables stolen when they returned. Particularly in the northern and western villages that were affected during the tribal fighter incursion on 18-19 July, though also during the government and tribal fighter advance on 14 July, witnesses reported heavy looting of the homes of those who had fled or been killed. Witnesses described the looting undertaken in phases, with first cash, gold, and other valuable items (such as fuel, agricultural produce or cooking oil and vehicles), then furniture, then solar panel, water tanks and structural items, such as doors, windows frames and electric cables. Once the looting was complete, the houses would be set on fire. Witnesses recalled that quality furniture would be taken away, while lesser quality furniture and goods were burned inside the houses.

202. A series of site visits conducted by the Commission across the northern and western villages from September 2025 onwards confirmed the massive scale of the burning that occurred. Nearly every home, business, or agricultural structure seen by the Commission, comprising thousands of homes, had been burned from Sura al Kabira to Um Elzaytun along the northern highway, and every village in the western zone except Aslaha and Kherba (where there are no Druze populations). This extended to religious buildings (see next subsection, below), which were also vandalized and looted, as well as every visible structure, both in the centre of villages and isolated homes and businesses. Vehicles that presumably could not be moved were also burned and left in the street or in driveways and courtyards of homes. The commission also observed various unexploded ordinance and remnants of war across these villages, in particular unexploded grenades and grenade pins, in and around burned homes. It also observed empty jerry cans in numerous locations, used for storing fuel for vehicles as well as heating fuel.

203. It should also be noted that the Commission observed that power transformer stations were also visibly destroyed in villages across these areas and in many places the power lines appeared to have been severed. This is consistent with interviewee statements that looters also stripped homes and utilities of usable metals, which reportedly continued in some villages at night through at least October 2025. Inside rooms that were not completely burned, the Commission also observed that remaining furniture was upturned, dishes and homewares had been emptied from shelves, consistent with looting or scavenging.

204. Looted items, including vehicles, were transported out of Suwayda governorate and were able to cross checkpoints without being stopped. For instance, one abductee recalled being transported out of Suwayda by armed men as part of a large convoy carrying many looted items, including house equipment such as fridges and washing machine, crossing several checkpoints without being stopped, or on occasion with looted items being given to soldiers manning checkpoints as bribes.

Attacks on religious buildings and objects

205. Religious buildings and objects of different faith groups were deliberately attacked during and after the July violence, impacting Druze, Christian, and Sunni Muslim religious buildings.

206. The largest number of affected sites were by far Druze Majlis and Maqams¹⁹², with 82 sites reportedly damaged, of which the Commission was able to document 14,¹⁹³ through e.g. interviews, site visits, and verified imagery and video.

207. The second largest number of sites were those belonging to Christians, with six churches reportedly impacted. The Commission able to document the looting and vandalism of four churches and the burning of three.¹⁹⁴ All of the impacted churches were located in villages with significant Druze populations while churches in areas with only Christian and Bedouin populations were not affected. All Druze and Christian affected sites were documented in the northern, western, and southwestern villages, and the burning or destruction of the sites took place between 13-20 July or afterwards. The vast majority were looted, vandalized, and at least partially burnt. Many were shot at with light and medium weapons.

208. Four mosques were also documented as having been targeted during the events, three in Suwayda city and one in Shahba town by SMCAGs. Though the Haroobi mosque in northern Suwayda city was shot at and damaged between 13 and 15 July, the looting and vandalism likely took place after the 16 July departure of government and tribal fighters.¹⁹⁵

209. At least one Druze religious building, the Maqam of Al Khidr in Sura al Kabira, was burned when ISF and tribal fighters entered the village following the convoy ambush on 30 April near Breq (see Annex II, section A, above). It had been repainted following that event but subsequently burned anew sometime after 14 July and vandalized, including with graffiti.

210. There is no information available to indicate that any place of worship was used at any time in relation to the Suwayda events to store weapons, as firing positions, or in any other manner that would limit the protections afforded under international humanitarian law to such buildings, though it cannot be excluded that some of the damage to structures was incidental during clashes.¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the Commission documented shooting that likely originated inside religious buildings hitting murals, painting, and other religious symbols

211. In addition to damage to religious buildings, Druze and Christian holy texts were damaged and destroyed, with torn pages and partially burned texts left inside and outside of religious buildings. In Christian churches, religious statues and frescoes were broken or removed as were crosses and altars. Druze religious sites and mosques were also marked with insulting or demeaning graffiti in many cases, and Druze five-pointed stars broken.

212. Following the July violence, credible reports of desecration of religious sites continued though at a much lower scale. For example, Bedouin fighters reportedly set fire to the Maqam of al-Khidr in Sami village on or around 14 August, with video of the burning spread on social media.¹⁹⁷ Likewise, another video was published on social media showing a group of Druze youths entering and vandalizing the Omar Ben Khatib Mosque in Maqwas, likely in October. Reportedly, the Druze local authorities in Suwayda detained some of those involved following the publication of the latter video.

¹⁹² A Majlis is a Druze house of worship, performing a similar function to a mosque while a Maqam is also a place of worship with a shrine located inside dedicated to the honour and memory of Druze Sheikhs.

¹⁹³ Maqam of Al Khidr in Sura al Kabira; Mazar Al Nabi Habeel (maqam) in Sura al Saghira, Maqam of Prophet Sheeths in Dhakir, Maqam of Al Khidr in Najran, Maqam Mawlay al-Kalima in al- Mjeimir village, (vandalized and damaged but not burnt), Mejlis of Majdal, Maqam of Prophet David in Majdal, Maqam of al-Khidr in the village of Labin, Maqam of Mazar Al Yasou' in Qarrasa, Mejlis of Rima Hazm, Maqam of Sayyidna Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Wahb Al-Qurashi in Sweimreh, Maqam Al Khidr in Khalkhaleh, Maqam of Al Khidr Abu Al Hool in Hazm village, Southern Religious Council (Mejlis) in Tarabei, and Maqam of al-Khidr in Sami.

¹⁹⁴ Holy Cross Church in Taara, Mar Mikhail Church in Sura al Kabira, and Mar Poulus Church in Radimeh Ellewa were burned in addition to being looting and vandalized, while the Saidna Bishara Church in Al Mazraa was looted and vandalized. The Mar Jerjius Church in Dweira and the Virgin Mary Church in Majdal were also reportedly impacted. Investigations are ongoing.

¹⁹⁵ There are reportedly 40 mosques in Suwayda and of those the Commission documented vandalism and attacks at four. There are no reports of damage to other mosques in Suwayda at present but it cannot be excluded.

¹⁹⁶ It should also be noted that the Omar Ben Khatib Mosque in Maqwas occupies a strategic location and may have been impacted by fighting in that area between 12 and 14 July.

¹⁹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1949861165841677>; There are also credible reports that the Maqam of Sheikh Abdallah in Beit Jinn in Rural Damascus close to Mount Hermon was attacked with explosives on 21 July, which some sources link to the events in Suwayda.

J. Role of misinformation in fuelling violence and obstacles to reconciliation

213. The violent events in Suwayda unfolded in an increasingly polarized context where misleading and false information circulated widely on social media, at the same time as access to first-hand information was restricted by the disruption of communication means in the governorate from 15-21 July.¹⁹⁸ This disruption provided a context ripe for false information to spread and for violations to go underreported in real-time.

214. The above-mentioned offensive audio recording falsely attributed to a Druze Sheikh had caused clashes in Jaramana and Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya already in April (see Annex II, section A, above) alongside a marked increase in anti-Druze sectarian rhetoric online. Misinformation on social media similarly played an important role in shaping narratives also during the escalation in Suwayda, and in particular to mobilize tribal fighters. In addition, more established, or embedded, media actors also presented selective or misleading narratives of the events to the public.

215. Some social media channels influential among tribes disseminated false or misleading information about violations against Bedouins, which encouraged tribal mobilization. In some cases, the information was entirely fabricated, such as the circulation of video from Mosul, Iraq in 2015 showing Daesh throwing people off buildings that was falsely attributed to Druze fighters.¹⁹⁹ In other examples, actual videos related to the events were misrepresented, such as a graphic video showing²⁰⁰ the bodies of a dead woman and a headless child, was presented as evidence of SMCAGs beheading Bedouin children. The Commission's subsequent investigation clarified though that the child's head had been severed by a projectile rather than as a result of a deliberate beheading (see Annex II, section E, above). Besides such misinformation, some channels also directly incited violence against Druze communities.²⁰¹

216. Similarly, false information circulated amplifying false claims of abuses by government and tribal fighters, such as claims of a large massacre at the Suwayda national hospital, despite the large amount of available video of actual violations.²⁰²

217. During the Commission's over 400 interviews, such false videos and claims would frequently be referred to – indicative of how misinformation has permeated narratives in all communities, risking making reconciliation more difficult going forward. These included outrageous claims of e.g. unborn Druze or Bedouin foetuses being removed from wombs or newborn infants being killed in gruesome ways. It is important to note that the Commission has not substantiated any such account.

218. Similarly, interviewees often displayed a lack of knowledge about the violations suffered by civilians of the opposite community even months after the events – indicative of the need for unbiased information sources shared and trusted by all communities in Syria. In this regard, State media has an important role to play to counter divisive social media algorithm-generated filter bubbles.²⁰³

¹⁹⁸ Suwayda residents consistently reported that mobile phone networks and Internet experienced serious disruption as of 15 July, hampering their ability to receive and share information as military operations were ongoing. Based on expert technical analysis provided by the Monash IP Observatory (Monash IP Observatory (SoDa Labs, Monash University) / KASPR Datahaus PTY LTD), active network measurements indicate a significant and coordinated disruption of internet connectivity in Suwayda in July 2025. The analysis identified an initial loss of connectivity on 15 July, first observed in Ariqa eastern side of Suwayda, followed by wider and more severe outages from 16 July onward affecting the area, including multiple days with zero connectivity. According to the analysis, the most intense period of coordinated disruption appears to be over 16-21 July, during which simultaneous outages across multiple locations severely restricted internet access and digital communications across the governorate. The Monash IP Observatory an independent research initiative of Monash University, see <https://ip-observatory.org>.

¹⁹⁹ See, <https://www.facebook.com/reel/992513519497204> accessed on 15 January 2026, also on file with the Commission.

²⁰⁰ See, <https://t.me/ZabidNewsOfficial811/40438> , accessed on 15 January 2026, also on file with the Commission.

²⁰¹ See, <https://t.me/ZabidNewsOfficial811/40502> , accessed on 15 January 2026, also on file with the Commission.

²⁰² See, <https://x.com/k7ybnd99/status/1945697837448106123?s=20> , accessed on 15 January 2026, also on file with the Commission.

The Commission did corroborate one killing by government forces inside the hospital and another where a person was last seen alive being interrogated inside the hospital and his body was located outside shortly after (see Annex II, section D, above), but its investigation did not substantiate any mass killing event inside the hospital in July 2025.

²⁰³ These are increasingly known to fuel violence, not least in contexts characterized by armed conflict, see e.g. <http://international-review.icrc.org/articles/how-harmful-information-on-social-media-impacts-people-affected-by-armed-conflict-926>

219. Some journalists who accompanied State security forces while violations were committed contributed to distorting the events. In the first one, a civilian held by ISF following the summary execution of one of his acquaintances on 15 July in Suwayda city, described being asked by a freelance journalist to provide a positive account on ISF treatment of civilians, which was shared on social media.²⁰⁴ In the second, the same day, another individual wearing a “press” jacket staged a fake rescue of Druze civilians during a Syrian Arab Army raid, despite there being no clashes at the time, and circulated the footage online to portray government forces as protectors.²⁰⁵

Embargoed until 27.03.26 @10h00

²⁰⁴ On file with the Commission.

²⁰⁵ On file with the Commission.

Annex III – Applicable law

1. The Commission has already examined the applicable national and international legal frameworks in its report A/HRC/59/CRP.4, Annex III. The national legal framework and international human rights law obligations, as well as the binding international treaty obligations of the state set out in that Annex continue as set forth in that Annex. The primary questions for the present report concern whether international humanitarian law was applicable and the *lex specialis* concerning events in Jaramana and Sahnaya-Achrafiyeh in April and May and in relation to As Suwayda in July.
2. Following the collapse of the Assad government on 8 December 2024 and its replacement by first a provisional government then a new government in March 2025 brought significant changes to the domestic legal framework in the Syrian Arab Republic. At the same time, the international legal obligations of the Syrian Arab Republic remain insofar as international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and international criminal law are concerned. Yet, rapid changes on the ground along with the realignment of actors vis-à-vis the government authorities require a re-examination of certain situations in terms of the controlling legal framework, not all of which are relevant for the present report.

National legal framework

3. The precise contours regarding the domestic law are not settled as of the drafting of this report, with the issuance of a Constitutional Declaration that replaced the 2012 Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic on 12 March 2025. The Constitutional Declaration, which was promulgated by the President and published in the Official Gazette, in its Article 48 provides that the “State shall create the appropriate foundation for achieving transitional justice through... repealing all exceptional laws that have harmed the Syrian people and contradicted human rights.” This language implies subsequent required action by the government as Article 51 clarifies that “[e]xisting laws remain in effect unless they are amended or repealed.” The various subsidiary bodies and institutions tasked with revising and interpreting domestic legislation per that instrument have not yet been established, however, leaving all legislation not specifically revoked by separate decree in place.
4. The substantive interpretation and application of certain norms, in particular the stipulation in Article 3 that Islamic Jurisprudence is the primary source of legislation in conjunction with the Article 12 provision that “[a]ll rights and freedoms stipulated in international human rights treaties, charters, and agreements ratified by the Syrian Arab Republic shall be an integral part of this Constitutional Declaration” remain to be clarified by subsequent legislation and domestic jurisprudence.
5. The legislation to be clarified following its adoption has yet to be enacted, but will likely form the domestic framework for the investigation and prosecution of the events in the present report. Basic criminal legislation, such as the Military Penal Code, Legislative Decree No. 61 of 1950, as amended, Syrian Penal Code, Law no. 148 of 1949, as amended, as well as the 2022 Torture law, Law no. 16 of 2022, will likely form the nucleus of domestic criminal proceedings in relation to the incidents described in this report.

International legal framework

6. As recently observed by the Commission, the domestic change in government in the Syrian Arab Republic in December 2024 did not alter the Syrian State’s obligations under public international law, including both international human rights and international humanitarian treaty and customary international law obligations.²⁰⁶ The overarching international legal framework as set out in numerous Commission reports remains in effect.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ See, A/HRC/ 59/CRP.4, Violations against civilians in the coastal and western- central regions of the Syrian Arab Republic (January–March 2025), Annex III, 11 August 2025.

²⁰⁷ See, for example, A/HRC/58/CRP.3, “Web of Agony”: Arbitrary Detention, Torture, and Ill-Treatment by former Government forces in the Syrian Arab Republic”, para 461 (27 January 2025), citing A/HRC/21/50, Annex II (16 August 2012).

7. It remained the case that both international and non-international armed conflicts were occurring on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic during the period under review. As the Commission has long observed, the existence of armed conflict triggering the application of international humanitarian law does not replace international human rights law obligations, but both legal regimes remain in effect and are considered complementary and mutually reinforcing. The principle of *lex specialis* provides for the application of body of law containing the more precise rules, in particular in case of divergence.²⁰⁸

A. International human rights law

8. The Syrian Arab Republic remained a party to those international human rights treaties it previously ratified, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1969), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1969), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969), the Convention on the Rights of Child (1993), as well as its Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2003), the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2003), and the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment (2004).

9. As a state party to the above-mentioned human rights treaties, the Syrian Arab Republic is required to investigate violations and provide for reparations in case of unlawful conduct in relation to such treaty obligations.²⁰⁹

10. Customary international human rights law also remains binding on the state. The Commission has also found that, at a minimum, *jus cogens* rules of international human rights law bind non-state actors that control and administer territory in the country.²¹⁰

11. As referenced above and despite the existence of multiple international and non-international armed conflicts taking place on Syrian territory, international human rights law applies concurrently with the principle of *lex specialis* providing for the determination of the precise obligations and duties applicable.²¹¹ In relation to acts described herein that amount to violations or abuses of international human rights law, such acts may amount to crimes under the domestic legislation of the Syrian Arab Republic.

B. International humanitarian law

12. As previously set forth, the circumstances leading to the change of government necessarily impacted the classification of various conflicts occurring on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic, but not the treaty and customary law obligations of the State itself. The Syrian Arab Republic remains party to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 as well as a number of other important international humanitarian law treaties.²¹² It is not a party to Protocol II Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), 8 June 1977. Additionally, customary international humanitarian law applicable to the various international and non-international armed conflicts continues to be applicable for each of those conflicts.

13. Unlike the events examined in A/HRC/59/CRP.4, there was no well-established pre-existing non-international armed conflict between the Druze-led armed groups in Rif Damascus or Suwayda and any other actor immediately prior to these events in question. Suwayda had been

²⁰⁸ International Court of Justice, Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, Advisory Opinion of 9 July 2004, ICJ Reports 2004, para. 106; International Court of Justice, Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons, Advisory Opinion of 8 July 1996, ICJ Reports 1996, para. 25. See also, Human Rights Committee, General Comment 31, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add. 13 (26 May 2004), para. 11.

²⁰⁹ See for example the analysis regarding such obligations contained in Human Rights Committee, General Comment 31, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add. 13 (26 May 2004), paras. 15-16.

²¹⁰ See for example, A/HRC/21/50, Annex II (16 August 2012). None of the non-state actors referenced in the present report were found to have controlled and administered territory during the period under consideration.

²¹¹ See footnote 94 above.

²¹² Geneva Conventions of 1949 (GCI, GCII, GCIII, GCIV), Protocol I Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 (1977), Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property of 1954, Hague Protocol for the Protection of Cultural Property of 1954, Geneva Protocol on Asphyxiating or Poisonous Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of 1925, Convention on the Prohibition of Biological Weapons of 1972, Second Hague Protocol for the Protection of Cultural Property of 1999, Convention prohibiting Chemical Weapons (2013).

relatively calm for the previous five years and the armed groups present were not engaged in any protracted fighting with either the precursors to the current government or the former.

14. There is an ongoing international armed conflict between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic by virtue of the continued military occupation of Syrian territory as well as the military operations beyond the 1974 line of control by Israel on Syrian territory as well as the claimed attacks by Israeli forces on Syrian Arab Army personnel, bases, positions, materiel and equipment including on As Suwayda against Syrian government forces and on the Ministry of Defence and elsewhere in direct connection to the events in As Suwayda. For the period under review, it is not controversial that the law of international armed conflict applies between the states of Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic in relation to the military operations carried out by Israel on Syrian territory.

15. A separate, important question for this report is whether a non-international armed conflict exists between the Syrian Arab Republic and armed groups operating against the government in Suwayda, Jaramana and Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya during the period covered by this report. As there is no question of continuity from a previously-classified armed conflict, the Commission must review whether the two-prong *Tadić* test was satisfied, namely whether the armed violence was of the requisite intensity and the armed groups involved were sufficiently organized for the conflict to amount to a non-international armed conflict.²¹³ As Additional Protocol II is not applicable in the present case, the Commission refers only to the more basic requirements in Common Article 3 regarding intensity and organization, as elaborated by international jurisprudence. Though often conflict classification analysis examines the intensity prior to the looking into the organizational capacity of armed groups, in the present case, given the multiplicity of armed actors, it is preferable to examine the various actors and their individual capacity first.²¹⁴

16. In considering the question of organizational capacity of the parties, it is first important to distinguish the parties to any conflict. One the one had there are a series of Druze-led armed groups that operated in Suwayda, Jaramana, and Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya during the period under review that have clear structures and chains of command, organized around common operations room, parts of which were organized under the banner of the “Military Council”, and later the “National Guard”. The factions that comprised these groups existed prior to the violence events under review. They were able to organize logistics and operations in a coordinated fashion and exert effective control over territory during the period in question. There were also smaller groups of armed Druze fighters with varying levels of organization and command and control as well as loosely organized village or neighborhood defense volunteers and individuals who took up arms independently. On the other hand, there were Syrian government forces and tribal formations, though tribal formations engaged in larger numbers only at the end of the period in question. The Syrian Internal Security Forces under the Ministry of Interior and the Syrian Arab Army under the Ministry of Defense have detailed structures with clear command and control as state forces and the sufficiency of their organization is not contested for the purposes of the classification question.

17. Regarding the question of intensity, at the beginning or armed confrontations covered in this report, there were clashes between Druze-led armed formations, including the Men of Dignity Movement and Syrian Government forces, notably in Jaramana and Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya

²¹³ *Tadić* Decision on the Defence Motion for Interlocutory Appeal on Jurisdiction, 1995, para. 70. See for example the indicative criteria set out in the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, *Boškoski and Tarčulovski* Trial Judgment, IT-04-82-T of 10 July 2008, paras. 177-178.” [internal citations omitted]. See also, International Criminal Court, *Hassan* Trial judgment, ICC-01/12-01/18, 26 June 2024, para 1097.

²¹⁴ For a list of non-exhaustive factors, see International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, *Boškoski and Tarčulovski* Trial Judgment, IT-04-82-T of 10 July 2008, paras 198-203, which can be summarised as the existence of a command structure; an internal disciplinary system; sufficient capacity to implement the laws of armed conflict; the ability to employ military tactics and achieve military objectives by carrying out organized military operations; the ability to organize logistics; and whether the group in question can speak with one voice. For a more minimalistic set of criteria, see International Criminal Court, *Katanga* Trial Judgment, ICC-01/04-01/07, of 7 March 2014, para. 1186. “For the purpose of determining whether an armed conflict was not of an international character, it must be decided whether a body was an organised armed group, and it may be relevant to consider the following non-exhaustive list of factors: the force or group’s internal hierarchy; its command structure and the rules applied within it; the extent to which military equipment, including firearms, are available; the force or group’s ability to plan military operations and put them into effect; and the extent, seriousness, and intensity of any military involvement. None of these factors are individually determinative.” [Internal citations omitted].

in April/May 2025.²¹⁵ Though Israeli military operations inside Syria have continued since the change of government in 2024, Israeli Defence Forces conducted a series of strikes that it publicly stated were to counter attacks on and threats against the Syrian Druze community in relation to the events in Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya during this period.²¹⁶ Additionally, a convoy of Druze armed group members seeking to reinforce Druze groups in those two areas engaged in an armed confrontation in the Breq area before withdrawing to Sura al Kabira that resulted in between 30 and 48 fighters killed. The groups subsequently withdrew to positions south of Sura al Kabira. The clashes in Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya in particular involved not only the use of small arms and vehicle mounted guns, but also armed drones. These confrontations last for approximately three days before subsiding, coinciding with the convoy of reinforcements being sent and their subsequent ambush.

18. Numerous smaller confrontations occurred in the area, though the precise actors involved were not immediately clear. Within Suwayda, armed groups set up increasing numbers of independent checkpoints, notwithstanding the fact that government-paid and locally recruited Internal Security Forces were present in the governorate.

19. The next major flare up of violence began around 11 July in the area around the Maqwas neighbourhood of Suwayda city. In that situation, organized Druze armed groups clashed with loosely organized Bedouin groups in the area, leading to more than 100 deaths and injuries and involving mortars, vehicle mounted guns, and large numbers of fighters. These clashes continued with varying intensity until the intervention of the Syrian Arab Army, on 14 July, but which time it had also clashed with Druze armed groups when entering Suwayda. The army was ambushed by Druze-led armed groups, resulting in the killing of at least eight government forces, as well as additional injuries and captured fighters. From at least this point, a prolonged shelling of Suwayda city began, employing tanks, rockets, mortars, and drones as the Syrian army then advanced into the city on 14-15 July. In some areas the government forces were met with fierce resistance, either from local defenders or organized armed groups that we later either overwhelmed or withdrew.

20. By the 14th, Israel intervened on the side of the Druze armed groups, carrying out strikes on Syrian forces, killing and injuring reportedly hundreds of government soldiers and Internal Security Forces. Thus, in addition to the intensity threshold having been met for a non-international armed conflict, a parallel international armed conflict was taking place at the same time (notwithstanding the existence of an international armed conflict by virtue of Israeli occupation of Syrian territory and attacks on and incursions into non-occupied territory elsewhere). There is insufficient information available to determine the degree of control Israeli forces may have exerted over Druze-led non-state armed groups but it is clear that they were operating in concert given that the Israeli intervention appeared to consistent with close air support for partnered forces.

21. While the precise command and control of tribal formations operating in the areas after the formal withdrawal of Syrian forces on 16-17 July cannot be accurately described, the Commission is satisfied that the acts of such groups were sufficiently linked to the armed conflict for the nexus with that conflict to be satisfied, thus bringing those actors within the purview of the law of non-international armed conflict and giving rise to potential individual liability for war crimes as appropriate.

22. In conclusion, it is reasonable to conclude that at least as of mid-July there was a conflict not of an international nature occurring in relation to the conflict between Suwayda-based Druze armed groups aligned with the Military Council and subsequently the Suwayda National Guard. In relation to any non-consensual use of force by Israel on Syrian territory before or after, the law of international armed conflict also applied between Israeli and Syrian forces operating in Suwayda and other areas referenced in this report. For the events preceding that date and in relation to events in Jaramana and Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya, those events are more appropriately examined through international human rights law though a reasonable interpretation would also be that the non-international armed conflict began during the events in Achrafiyeh-Sahnaya on

²¹⁵ See for example the indicative criteria concerning the intensity threshold set out in the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Boškoski and Tarčulovski Trial Judgment, IT-04-82-T of 10 July 2008, paras. 177-178." [internal citations omitted]. See also, International Criminal Court, Hassan Trial judgment, ICC-01/12-01/18, 26 June 2024, para 1097.

²¹⁶ PM Netanyahu Speaks with the Spiritual Leader of the Druze Community in Israel, Sheikh Mowafaq Tarif, 2 May 2025, available at: <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/spoke-tariff020525>.

30 April in conjunction with events on the Suwayda-Damascus highway in the Breq and Sawara al Kubira areas.

C. International criminal law

23. Regarding international criminal law framework, the existing treaty and customary law framework binding the Syrian Arab Republic continues to remain in force. For international armed conflicts, the relevant breaches and grave breaches regimes contained within the Geneva Conventions of 1949, Second Hague Protocol for the Protection of Cultural Property of 1999, and Additional Protocol I remain applicable.

24. Additionally, the international criminal law obligations from the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, ratified in 1955, also remain applicable.

25. While the Syrian Arab Republic signed the Rome Statute in 2000, it was never ratified and as of this writing there had been no declaration or self-referral allowing for jurisdiction of the court over events in Syria. Given the limited application of explicit treaty law governing international crimes in Syria, and in particular in relation to the primarily non-international nature of the various conflicts, the primary lens through which war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other international crimes have been analyzed remains customary international criminal law.²¹⁷ The Commission relies primarily on the jurisprudence of international tribunals and the definitions set out in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court that have been widely accepted as establishing the customary elements of international crimes, supplemented by widely cited and accepted studies that compile evidence of consistent state practice and *opinion juris*.

26. It should be noted that when the Commission has reasonable grounds to believe that conduct that would entail individual criminal responsibility has occurred, it generally attributes such conduct to a party to the conflict. The Commission itself is not a judicial or quasi-judicial entity that makes determinations concerning the requisite *mens rea* of specific individuals.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ See A/HRC/21/50, annex II.

²¹⁸ See A/HRC/52/69, para 2.

Annex IV – Correspondence with the Syrian Arab Republic



Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

PALAIS DES NATIONS • 1211 GENEVA 10, SWITZERLAND

• WEB : www.ohchr.org/coisyrria • TEL: +1-22-9171234 • FAX: +41-22-9179007 • E-MAIL: ohchr-coisyrria@un.org

Established pursuant to UN Human Rights Council Resolution S-17/1 (2011), extended by 19/22 (2012), 21/26 (2102), 22/24 (2013), 25/23 (2014), 28/20 (2015), 31/17 (2016), 34/26 (2017), 37/29 (2018), 40/17 (2019), 43/28 (2020), 46/22 (2021), 49/27 (2022), 52/30 (2023), 55/22 (2024), and 58/25 (2025)

REFERENCE: COISYRIA/29/2025

11 September 2025

Dear Foreign Minister Al-Shaibani,

My fellow Commissioners and I would like to express our renewed appreciation for your government's support to the mandate of the Commission through Human Rights Council resolution 58/25 and our cooperation since. We are looking forward to meeting you soon in Damascus.

In line with our mandate, we are currently investigating a range of violations alleged to have occurred in Suwayda governorate during July 2025, including the unlawful killing of civilians, torture and ill-treatment, abduction and looting and destruction of civilian property, in preparation for our upcoming briefings to the UN Human Rights Council in September and General Assembly in October.

In this regard, as requested through our focal point within the Ministry, we would like to seek access to Suwayda' and other areas hosting people displaced from Suwayda' for our team of investigators within coming weeks. In addition, if feasible, we the Commissioners could also conduct a one-day visit to Suwayda' during our upcoming visit to Syria, for instance on 18 September, in order to prepare for the investigative visit by the team by meeting community leaders and members of civil society.

During these upcoming visits, we would be grateful for information from the interim authorities concerning the violent events in Suwayda' governorate and the overall context in which they occurred, including the preceding late April violent events in Jaramana and Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, Rural Damascus, as set out in further detail in the Annex to this letter.

We thank you once again for the Syrian interim government's support and look forward to our meeting and continued engagement in furtherance of our mandate.

Sincerely,



Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro
Chair, United Nations Independent International
Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

H.E. Mr. Asaad Hassan al-Shaibani
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates
Syrian Arab Republic

Request for information regarding incidents and events under investigation occurring in April and July in Rural Damascus and Suwayda' governorates respectively and related contextual information

The Commission would be grateful for information from the interim authorities concerning the below listed incidents under investigation occurring in April and July in Rural Damascus and Suwayda' governorates respectively, as well as concerning the overall context before, during and after their occurrence. If it would aid in identifying the particular incident or support the interim government's own investigations, the Commission would be pleased to provide further information, subject to the informed consent of sources and in line with standard practices, through its focal point within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In this regard, the Commission has obtained reliable accounts detailing incidents involving killing and injuring of civilians, abductions and acts of humiliation and degradation — including the forced shaving of Druze men — as well as looting and the destruction of civilian property. We are also looking into allegations of forced displacement of Bedouin communities. We would be grateful for any relevant information the interim authorities may provide, pertaining to events occurring on the dates and in the locations listed below:

- Between 27 and 30 April 2025, civilians were reportedly killed, injured and detained in the context of attacks on residential neighbourhoods and armed clashes in Ashrafiya Sahnaya, Jaramana (Rural Damascus) and Suwayda' governorate.
- On 11 July 2025, a civilian was reportedly held captive and ill-treated by a group of unknown armed men on the Damascus-Suwayda' highway, reportedly triggering further abductions of civilians by armed men in Suwayda' governorate.
- Between 13-16 July 2025, civilians were allegedly killed and injured, both in clashes and in house raids in different parts of Suwayda' governorate, including Suwayda' city and surrounding villages, including Al Tha'la, Walgha and Al Marzr'a villages. Civilian property was allegedly looted, damaged and destroyed, including religious sites such as churches and at Druze shrines in al Majdal, Najran and Qarrasa, including by being set on fire. In Suwayda' National Hospital specifically, civilians, including medical personnel, were allegedly killed and injured on 15-16 July.
- On 20 July 2025, the Druze Sheikh Abdullah shrine in Beit Jin, Jabal Al-Sheikh area, Rif Dimashq was allegedly attacked and damaged.
- Between mid-July and mid-August 2025, humanitarian workers were allegedly abducted in Suwayda' city, Suwayda' governorate.

In this context, the most useful forms of assistance for the Commission are the facilitation of unrestricted access to victims or witnesses known to the interim government and the provision of materials, imagery of incident sites, assessments of any munition remnants, forensic data, expert, military and/or forensic reports, as well as maps and any other relevant documentation that could be shared with the Commission.

We also note the identical letters dated 16 July 2025 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations regarding the alleged killing and injury of civilians and members of the interim authorities' security forces in airstrikes by the Israel Defence Forces on that date and would be grateful for further details on these alleged attacks. We also welcome information regarding the 30 April 2025 airstrikes which allegedly hit residential area in Ashrafiya Sahanaya, Rural Damascus with casualties reported.

Further, we would appreciate information regarding the interim authorities' operations in Suwayda' governorate prior to the escalation and since 13 July and whether the interim government's operations in Suwayda were deemed law enforcement or military operations, or a combination thereof. In this context, we welcome information regarding the number of internal security forces and armed forces deployed locally in Suwayda before, during and after the escalation, and information regarding the operational relationship, if any, between these forces and the tribal fighters who took part in the Suwayda' confrontations. We would also be grateful for information on the locations and timings of clashes and attacks between the internal security forces, Bedouin and tribal fighters and Druze fighters respectively and related casualty figures, as well as information on specific incidents in which civilians and those who had laid down their arms, were killed and injured.

The Commission is aware of the interim government's numerous meetings with the Suwayda' community leaders since December 2024. In this context, the Commission would also be grateful for information regarding the interim government's efforts to protect civilians before and during the clashes involving Bedouin and tribal fighters and Druze fighters, including on the Suwayda'–Damascus highway. In this regard, the Commission would appreciate information regarding official statements, orders and communications made by the interim authorities to security forces, factions affiliated with the interim authorities and tribal fighters with the aim of protecting civilians in the lead up to and during the Suwayda' July incidents. In particular, we would welcome information concerning what actions the interim authorities undertook to address alleged human rights violations as soon as credible information concerning alleged unlawful killing, injuring, degrading treatment and abductions of unarmed civilians and widespread looting and property damage and destruction and forced displacement emerged.

We have also received information regarding the alleged abduction of women and girls from Suwayda' governorate, as well as allegations of rape and sexual violence. We would be grateful for any information that the interim authorities may have regarding these allegations and whether any individuals have been investigated and/or arrested for such actions, as well as efforts to inform family members of abductees of such investigations.

Regarding humanitarian assistance, the Commission has received information about alleged restrictions to the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Suwayda' governorate in the immediate aftermath of the mid-July violence. It would appreciate information on this as well as on measures taken by the interim authorities to address the mass displacement of civilians, both Druze and Bedouins, some of whom are reportedly still prevented from accessing homes and villages located west and north of Suwayda' city.

Concerning accountability, we note reports that members both of the internal security forces (under the Ministry of Interior) and the armed forces (under the Ministry of Defence) have been arrested for their alleged role in crimes committed in Suwayda' and have been referred to the judiciary. We would be grateful for further information regarding the number of individuals arrested and detained; their ranks and functions in regular forces, or alternatively under which armed group they operated; the legal basis for their arrest; the charges that have been brought against these alleged perpetrators; and the courts in which these cases will be tried. We also seek information on any other sanctions applied to members or commanders of forces in relation to these events, such as formal reprimands, dismissals, transfers, or relief of command. We note the 31 July announcement by the Ministry of Justice regarding the establishment of a committee to investigate the recent events in Suwayda'. We have sought a meeting with the committee during our upcoming visit to Syria, and look forward to its findings, which we encourage the interim authorities to publicize.

Last, we would be interested in information regarding the steps taken by the interim authorities to prevent future violence in Suwayda', as well as in other areas of the country, including by addressing online and offline hate speech and all forms of incitement to sectarian violence.

Annex V Table of violations by location

Table 1: Alleged violations investigated in selected locations (C=Corroborated by 1st March 2026)²¹⁹

Location	Looting	Burning	Killings			Attacks on religious sites	Displacement
			Men	Women	Children		
Dama	C						C
Dor	C	C	C			C	C
Hazm	C	C				C	C
Jrein	C	C					C
Kafir	C	C					C
Kalidiyeh	C	C					C
Kanaker	C	C	C			C	C
Khalkhaleh	C	C				C	C
Kherba	C	C					C
Lahetheh	C	C	C	C			C
Lebbin	C	C				C	C
Majadel	C	C				C	C
Mansoura	C	C	C		C		C
Mazraa	C	C	C	C		C	C
Mjeimir	C	C				C	C
Najran	C	C				C	C
Ora	C						C
Qarrasa	C	C	C	C		C	C
Rdemat al-Liwa	C	C	C	C		C	C
Rima Hazem	C	C	C	C		C	C
Sahwet Balata	C	C	C	C			C
Salakhed	C	C					C
Samie	C	C				C	C
Shahba	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
Sura Al Kabira	C	C	C	C		C	C
Sura Al Saghira	C	C	C			C	C
Suwayda city	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
Sweimreh	C	C	C			C	C
Taara	C	C	C			C	C
Thaala	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
Thakir	C	C				C	C
Tireh	C	C	C				C
Um Elzaytun	C	C	C	C			C
Um Hartein	C	C					C
Walgha	C	C	C	C		C	C

²¹⁹ Note that this table includes violations by location. It is meant to provide a snapshot of the overall impact on civilians rather than a detailed breakdown of violation by perpetrator. It includes the 35 villages that were subjected to burning and looting in northern and western Suwayda during operations by government forces and tribal fighters from 14-16 July as well as the more destructive period between 17 and 19 July. It also includes villages where violations were committed by SMCAGs such as Shahba and Mansoura as well as locations where violations were recorded by tribal fighters and SMCAGs on different dates, such as Um Elzaytun.

Embargoed until 27.03.26 @10h00