

SNHR

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Developments in Rif Dimashq and Sweida (April 29–May 4, 2025): A Reading of the Violations and Repercussions

A call for arms control, enhanced accountability, protection
of civilians, and a comprehensive national dialogue

Saturday 27 September 2025





The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.

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First: A Complex Security Escalation in a Fragile Transitional Environment: Rif Dimashq and Sweida between April 29 and May 4, 2025:

Between April 29 and May 4, 2025, various areas in the Rif Dimashq and Sweida governorates witnessed a widespread security escalation, marked by violent armed clashes and mutual attacks targeting civilian neighborhoods, security checkpoints, and major roads. Multiple parties participated in these events, including official units affiliated with the Ministries of Defense and Interior, supported by armed tribal groups, as well as undisciplined formations that appeared to be formally affiliated with the Ministry of Defense without actually being subject to its authority. In contrast, local armed groups with a regional and sectarian (Druze) nature participated, likely belonging to factions from the Sweida Governorate, and believed to have been negotiating with the Ministry of Defense regarding their integration into official security structures.

These events were concentrated in cities and towns such as Jaramana, Ashrafieh Sahnaya, and Sahnaya in Rif Dimashq, in addition to a number of villages in the Sweida governorate. They resulted in dozens of deaths and injuries among civilians, security personnel, and local militants, as well as the detention of large numbers of residents and material damage to public and private property.

This escalation has been characterized by its wide geographical scope and the multiplicity of actors involved. Various types of violations have been documented, including: direct targeting of civilians, possible field killings, mutilation of corpses, indiscriminate use of heavy weapons in populated areas, detentions without clear legal procedures, and destruction of property.

This escalation coincided with a marked increase in sectarian rhetoric across some local media outlets and social media platforms, with negative repercussions for the university and community environment. This indicates the fragility of the situation and opens the door to a wider explosion in the absence of an effective institutional response.

The Israeli occupation's intervention during this period, through airstrikes on sites in and around Damascus, has further complicated the security situation and widened the circle of tension, particularly in light of the sectarian justifications offered by the occupying government. These justifications, from the perspective of international law, constitute a clear violation of Syrian sovereignty and direct interference in its internal affairs.

In this context, the complex nature of the escalation stands out, occurring within a fragile security environment characterized by the proliferation of unregulated weapons and weak channels of accountability and control. The overlap between official and semi-official forces and local groups further complicates the security landscape and makes it difficult to determine direct responsibility for the many violations committed.

These events highlight the magnitude of the security and social challenges facing the Syrian transitional government at this stage, revealing the dangerous gaps in the control of irregular weapons and the continuing effects of civil division in some areas. They also underscore the need for a serious review of official response mechanisms, the activation of transitional justice tools, and the development of sustainable civil protection policies that restore respect for the rule of law and enhance community confidence in state institutions.

This report aims to provide field documentation and preliminary analysis of the security incidents and violations that occurred between April 29 and May 4, 2025, in the areas of Jaramana, Ashrafiyah Sahnaya, the Damascus-Sweida Road, and a number of villages in Suwayda Governorate. It also aims to monitor the associated societal and security repercussions and offer recommendations that enhance the protection of civilians, support the principle of accountability, and contribute to the activation of transitional justice mechanisms.

Second: Report Methodology:

This report relies on a field documentation methodology and monitoring of violations related to the security escalation witnessed in the areas of Jaramana, Ashrafiyah Sahnaya, the Damascus-Sweida Road, and a number of villages in Sweida Governorate, during the period from April 29 to May 4, 2025. This escalation was accompanied by armed clashes, mutual attacks, detentions, and attacks on property. This documentation comes as part of the Syrian Network for Human Rights' ongoing monitoring of security developments and human rights violations in various Syrian regions during the transitional phase.

The report preparation process was based on a combination of primary and secondary information sources, in accordance with the network's approved verification standards. The methodology includes the following:

1. **Direct field monitoring** through a network of local researchers in rural Damascus and Sweida included collecting primary testimonies from residents of the affected areas through telephone interviews and documented voice messages, conducted during or shortly after the events, while ensuring the safety and confidentiality of witnesses. The monitoring also included analyzing the sites of clashes and documenting data on victims and detainees.
2. **Visual analysis of visual materials** collected from open sources and eyewitnesses during and after the events, and verification of their authenticity in terms of time and place, by cross-referencing visual and geographical elements with open-source maps, matching faces and spatial landmarks, and ensuring that there are no indications of digital manipulation or distortion.

3. **Cross-referencing information from multiple sources**, including local, medical, media, and civil society sources, to ensure the accuracy of facts and avoid bias or reliance on a single narrative.
4. **Monitoring and analyzing official statements** issued by local security agencies, the Ministry of Interior, and the Israeli Broadcasting Authority, in addition to what was published on official social media accounts, were conducted. These statements were archived and analyzed in a chronological order consistent with the developments in the situation.
5. **Verifying the names of victims and detainees** based on SNHR's database, and cross-referencing it with reliable field sources, while refraining from publishing the names out of respect for the privacy of the victims and their families and limiting the report to the digital tally.
6. **Review local medical reports**, particularly from Al-Salam Hospital in Sahnaya and other health centers, to confirm the nature and timing of injuries and their consistency with field accounts.
7. **Distinguishing between the parties involved** in the events and violations, according to their apparent functional or military affiliation (security personnel, local groups, tribal militants, etc.), without issuing pre-judgments, and based only on available evidence.

Challenges and Limits of Documentation

Despite the efforts made by SNHR's team to document the events in Jaramana, Ashrafiyah Sahnaya, and the Damascus-Sweida Road, the report faced a number of challenges that partially affected the comprehensiveness of the documentation, most notably:

1. **The complex nature of the events:** Multiple actors were involved in the clashes, including both official and local forces, and the incidents were spread across different geographic areas over a short period of time, making it difficult to accurately chronologically and accurately trace the events.
2. **The complexities of the security situation:** The events coincided with an escalation in the field, sweeping operations, detentions, and intermittent clashes. This prevented direct access to some sites or witnesses, forcing reliance on extremely cautious local sources.
3. **Limited access to official data:** The transitional authorities did not release comprehensive statistics or detailed data on victims, detainees, or parties involved, forcing the team to rely on unofficial medical and community sources.

4. **Risk of prosecution of witnesses:** Some witnesses and activists faced threats after providing information, necessitating additional protection measures that included concealing their identities and modifying the location and time details of some testimonies.
5. **Delayed flow of information:** The results of some events—such as deaths or releases—continued to emerge during May, requiring constant review and updating of data.
6. **Lack of clarity regarding the institutional identity of some armed groups:** In several areas, it was not possible to confirm the organizational affiliation of some armed groups, necessitating the use of a general description as «local armed groups outside the framework of the state,» pending the availability of additional information. The network emphasizes that this classification is applied regardless of political allegiance or coordination with the state.

Definition:

Local armed groups outside the framework of the state: This term refers to armed formations that do not follow a formal organization or clear administrative hierarchy within the state's security or military institutions. These include:

- Tribal or regional groups loyal to the transitional government, sometimes participating in security or combat operations in informal coordination with state agencies, but not legally or functionally subject to the State's authority.
 - Local opposition factions, which exercise security or military influence within their areas and operate independently of any official structure.
7. **Unconfirmed identity of some victims:** Some cases of killing or injury were visually documented without the possibility of verifying identity, so they were not included in the final statistics.

Despite these challenges, the team adhered to standards and protocols for verification and systematic cross-referencing of information, aiming to provide an objective and reliable presentation of the facts, while recognizing the limitations of comprehensive coverage in such a complex context. The report is presented as a partial and interim documentation of the data collected up to the time of its preparation, with the possibility of updating it later if new information becomes available.

Third: The Facts of the Security Incidents and the Accompanying Violations:

This section documents the developments of the security escalation witnessed in the cities of Jaramana and Ashrafieh Sahnaya, and the Damascus-Sweida Road, during the period from April 29 to May 4, 2025. It presents a timeline based on data verified by SNHR's team from multiple sources. The events are arranged chronologically, with separate sections devoted to each region, allowing for an accurate and coherent presentation of events.

SNHR's data indicates that the peak of the security escalation occurred during the period extending from April 29 to May 4, 2025, with continued documentation of sporadic shelling and clashes in the following weeks. Among the most notable of these incidents was the artillery shelling that hit Sweida Governorate on June 6, 2025, when five mortar shells landed in the vicinity of the village of Barak in the eastern Sweida countryside, resulting in varying degrees of material damage.

1. The events in Jaramana City – The morning of Tuesday, April 29, 2025:

The city of Jaramana in the Damascus countryside witnessed a widespread security escalation in the early hours of Tuesday, April 29, 2025, following the spread of an audio recording attributed to a member of the Druze community, which contained statements considered religiously offensive. This recording sparked a wave of tension and incitement of a religious and sectarian nature, despite the lack of confirmed information about the identity of the speaker or the entity that published it.

Within hours, armed clashes erupted in various neighborhoods of the city, later spreading to surrounding areas. Local armed groups outside the state, some with unofficial links to security agencies, clashed with other local groups, either residents of the city or those coming from outside.

Light weapons and medium machine guns were used during the clashes, which included attacks on civilian sites, forcing a number of families to flee early for fear of escalating violence.

According to a [statement](#) issued by the Syrian Ministry of Interior, the clashes erupted as a result of «incitement and hate speech stemming from the video,» without identifying the party responsible for the escalation or clarifying the nature of the security intervention that took place.

The escalation resulted in:

1. Deaths among members of the security forces and armed groups, both loyal to official bodies and outside the state.
2. Targeting of residential neighborhoods and closure of some roads within the city.
3. Intervention by the Ministry of Interior, along with local dignitaries, in an attempt to contain the situation and impose a temporary curfew.

According to SNHR documentation:

1. At least **eight armed** individuals were killed during the clashes, some of whom were likely affiliated with the Ministries of Interior and Defense, while insufficient information was available to determine the job title of the others, who were likely affiliated with local armed groups active in the city's vicinity without a clear institutional connection.
2. At least **8 members** of local armed groups outside the state were killed, most of them residents of the city of Jaramana, including members from villages in the southern and northern countryside of Sweida who participated in the armed clashes.
3. Various civilian injuries were recorded, in addition to material damage to shops and public facilities as a result of the exchange of fire.

This escalation has had a particular impact on women and children, with internal displacement of families for fear of child casualties, and local mothers reporting difficulty providing care for their children due to the disruption of basic services during the period of tension.

2. Ashrafieh Sahnaya – The evening of Tuesday, April 29, 2025 and the Morning of Wednesday April 30, 2025:

Following the security tensions in the city of Jaramana, the Director of Security for the Damascus Countryside, Lieutenant Colonel Hussam al-Tahhan, [announced](#) on Wednesday morning, April 30, 2025, that a local ceasefire agreement had been reached between the city's notables and some security agencies. The agreement included the handover of the bodies of those killed and the initiation of measures aimed at calming the situation and restoring stability.

However, this agreement was not actually implemented, as the Ashrafiyah Sahnaya area and the neighboring town of Sahnaya witnessed a dangerous escalation the previous evening (April 29), represented by [the infiltration of armed groups outside the state framework into agricultural lands](#) and the vicinity of security checkpoints, and their targeting of civilian and military movements, which led to the outbreak of widespread clashes.

On the morning of Wednesday, April 30, clashes escalated between members of the Public Security Forces and local armed groups outside the state. Some are linked to local tribal networks or coordinate with security agencies, while others belong to factions with regional and sectarian characteristics. Machine guns and mortar shells were used in these clashes within populated residential areas, posing a direct threat to the lives of civilians.

Security Meetings – April 30, 2025

Two official meetings were held in the Damascus countryside on April 30, attended by Syrian government officials and a number of Druze sheikhs and dignitaries, in an attempt to contain the security and social escalation in the city of Ashrafiyah Sahnaya.

1. **The first meeting – Daraya City:** It was held in Daraya with the attendance of a religious and civil delegation from As-Suwayda Governorate, including Sheikhs Yousef Jarbou' and Hamoud Al-Hanawi, the leader of the Men of Dignity Movement, Sheikh Yahya Al-Hajjar, and Sheikh Laith Al-Balous, along with the governors of Damascus, Rural Damascus, and As-Suwayda.
2. **The second meeting – Sheikh Anis Al-Haj Ali's guest house, Ashrafiyah Sahnaya:** It included local security officials and local dignitaries, and focused on violations committed by individuals affiliated with security agencies, in addition to observations on media coverage described as «inaccurate.»

The meeting resulted in several measures, most notably:

1. The formation of a joint local security committee between the towns of Sahnaya and Ashrafiyah Sahnaya.
2. Launching a campaign to collect unlicensed weapons in the area.
3. Designating an official hotline to receive residents' complaints.
4. Calling on civilians to volunteer with the Ministry of Interior.

Visual Analysis Results:

Videos published via several open-source sources revealed clear signs of the presence of armed groups and their potential identities:

1. Armed men from [the Akidat tribe](#) were deployed in the main al-Tayyara Square in Ashrafiyah Sahnaya on April 29, waving an unidentified flag, a symbolic sign of control.

2. In a video dated April 30, [members of the same group](#) were seen seizing the weapons and ammunition of a dead man from local armed groups outside the state, in a scene that appeared to be vengeful.
3. Documentation of the participation of armed men from [the Quraan tribe](#) in the fighting, with no indications of their affiliation with official formations, [suggesting the involvement of independent tribal groups](#).
4. [Other videos showed fighters outside the state's](#) control using heavy 23mm machine guns inside a crowded civilian area, employing a «long burst» firing pattern, posing a significant threat to civilian lives due to the lack of accurate targeting in this context.
5. [Images were also circulated of the body of a security officer from the Public Security Directorate](#) who was tortured after his death, [in a clear violation of the rules for protecting human dignity](#) in conflict.

Results of the Clashes and Repercussions:

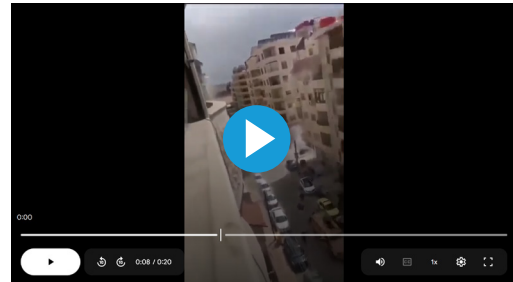
according to documentation by SNHR, [these events resulted in](#):

1. The killing of **16 members** of the General Security Directorate during attacks on security points and checkpoints.
2. The killing of a number of civilians as a result of indiscriminate gunfire, including an eight-year-old child.
3. Initial information (under verification) indicates cases of summary executions.
4. Casualties as a result of bombing carried out by a Shahin drone, likely belonging to the Ministry of Defense.
5. At least **70 people** were injured on April 29 and 30, including civilians, [security personnel](#), and a [Red Crescent volunteer](#). A number of them were transferred in critical condition to hospitals in Damascus.
6. **Several militants** were detained, most of whom were not directly involved in the fighting and were later released.

Despite official and civil efforts to contain the escalation, clashes continued to flare up repeatedly, exacerbating the humanitarian situation and causing a limited displacement of families who were forced to leave the area for fear of escalating violence.

3. The Israeli Occupation interference in an escalation of the security situation – The evening of Wednesday, April 30, 2025 and up to May 3, 2025:

On the evening of Wednesday, April 30, 2025, a drone, likely belonging to the Israeli Air Force, launched an airstrike targeting a security checkpoint near Ashrafieh Sahnaya in the Damascus countryside. The strike killed one security member and wounded others, according to what the Syrian Network for Human Rights documented, based on cross-referenced [medical sources](#) as well as local ones.



↑ A video clip showing the moment of the Israeli bombing of Ashrafieh Sahnaya.

This attack was carried out at the height of a widespread internal escalation in the Damascus countryside and Sweida. The Israeli Broadcasting Corporation (Kan) reported that the targeting was part of what it described as a «series of preemptive attacks,» under the pretext of «preventing potential attacks on members of the Druze community.» In a [statement](#) issued on May 6, 2025, SNHR considered this justification to constitute a dangerous exploitation of sectarian rhetoric and direct interference in Syria’s internal affairs, likely to inflame societal divisions and complicate local armed conflicts.

The same statement also documented additional Israeli airstrikes between May 2 and 3, 2025, targeting military sites and civilian facilities in the governorates of Damascus, As-Suwayda, Daraa, Hama, and Latakia. These attacks resulted in the deaths of at least four civilians, including one victim in the As-Suwayda countryside, and the injury of two members of the Syrian Ministry of Defense, in addition to extensive material damage. The raids included sites of sovereign symbolism, most notably the vicinity of the presidential palace in Damascus, which the network considered a qualitative and aggressive shift in the nature of Israeli targeting.

These attacks constitute a flagrant violation of Article (2/4) of the United Nations Charter, which prohibits the use or threat of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. They also do not meet the conditions for exercising the right of self-defense stipulated in Article (51) of the Charter, given the absence of a direct or imminent threat that would justify this type of unilateral military intervention.

The repeated Israeli airstrikes inside Syrian territory, particularly targeting civilian areas or sites bearing sovereign symbols, without any UN authorization, constitute a grave violation of international law and threaten security and stability in Syria and the region. They also set a dangerous precedent for the use of sectarian protection as a justification for foreign military intervention.

From a legal perspective, this link between attacks and the protection of an internal social group deepens regional and sectarian divisions, exacerbates the fragility of the security situation, and exposes civilians to further violations.

4. Clashes on Damascus-Sweida Road (between Barak and al Soura al Kabira) – Wednesday, April 30, 2025:

Amid escalating security tensions in the southern Damascus countryside, violent armed clashes erupted on Wednesday, April 30, 2025, on the road between Damascus and As-Suwayda governorates, specifically in the area between the towns of Barak and Al-Soura Al-Kabira on the administrative border between Daraa and As-Suwayda. Clashes erupted between armed groups from Bedouin tribes, including members of the Ministries of Defense and Public Security, and local armed groups outside the state framework from As-Suwayda governorate, who were heading to the Sahnaya area to provide military support to factions involved in the ongoing clashes there.

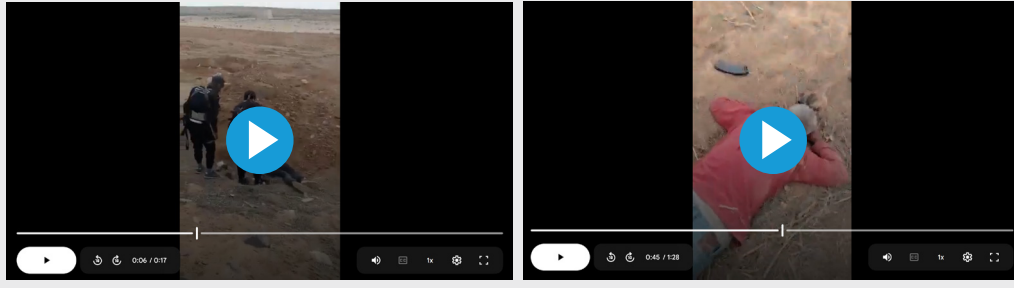
According to documentation by SNHR, and through an analysis of cross-cutting field and visual data, the clashes erupted following an armed ambush set up by tribal groups targeting scattered convoys of armed men arriving from Sweida. Light and medium weapons were used in the clash, and the confrontations resulted in a large number of deaths and injuries on both sides. In addition, several individuals are believed to have been taken or disappeared during the clashes.

Highlights of the documented incidents:

1. At least **eight tribal members** affiliated with the General Security and the Ministry of Defense were killed, in addition to armed elements from the Lajat area east of Daraa.
2. At least **49 armed** members of local factions outside the state, originally from As-Suwayda Governorate, were killed.
3. A number of civilians were injured in the exchange of random gunfire in the vicinity of the clashes.

Verified video footage showed a direct targeting of several support vehicles coming from As-Suwayda, which resulted in the burning of some vehicles and disrupted traffic on the international highway for several hours.

Video footage shows casualties from local armed groups outside the state, who were heading from As-Suwayda Governorate towards the Sahnaya area, after being ambushed on the As-Suwayda-Damascus road near the village of Barak on the administrative border between Daraa and As-Suwayda Governorates on April 30, 2025.



↑ Video shows the use of mortars by local armed groups outside the state, who were heading to Damascus, after being ambushed in the Lajat area on April 30, 2025.

These clashes indicate a dangerous escalation in violence based on regional and tribal affiliations. They also underscore the fragility of the security situation on vital roads connecting the governorates, given the absence of effective protection measures and institutional control over weapons and irregular armed forces.

5. Assault on villages and towns in Sweida Governorate – Wednesday, April 30, 2025:

On Wednesday, April 30, 2025, Sweida Governorate witnessed a dangerous escalation, marked by a large-scale armed attack launched by groups of Bedouin tribes, including members of the Ministries of Defense and Public Security. The attack targeted several villages and towns, most notably the village of al-Suwara al-Kabira, north of the governorate, near the border with Daraa Governorate.

The attack began with indiscriminate shelling using mortars and heavy machine guns, causing extensive material damage and setting fires in several homes. The attacking groups were able to temporarily enter the village, amid initial reports of killings inside some homes. These reports could not be fully verified due to the difficulty of access and the communications blackout.

Meanwhile, the village of Kanaker was subjected to an attempted incursion using medium weapons and mortar shells, which local factions were able to repel. The villages of Ara and Rasas in the western countryside were also subjected to shelling, causing material damage to civilian property.

Documented results of the attack:

1. At least one civilian, Majid Hamza (Abu Safi) from the town of Rasas, died on May 2, 2025, from wounds sustained from flying glass shards after a mortar shell landed near his home.
2. Four other civilians were killed in simultaneous Israeli airstrikes.
3. An unspecified number of civilians were injured in various towns.
4. Several homes were burned in the village of al-Surah al-Kabira, according to analysis of satellite imagery and available recordings.
5. The al-Khader shrine, a religious symbol in the village, was damaged in the attacks.



Subsequent Shelling Incidents:

The network recorded at least **nine shelling** incidents using mortars and heavy machine guns during the period from May 1 to 13, resulting in one civilian injury, material damage, and temporary displacement. The most notable of these incidents are:

1. **May 1, 2025:** Shelling of the villages of Labeen and Harran in the Sweida countryside, causing material damage.
2. **May 5, 2025:**
 - Renewed shelling of the village of Harran.
 - Shells fell near the village of Tha'la, without causing damage.
 - Shelling of the village of Dara, leading to partial displacement of residents.
 - **May 11, 2025:** Two shells fell in the city of Sweida (the Qala'a neighborhood and the western side), causing minor material damage.
 - **May 13, 2025:** Shelling of the village of Al-Majimar, injuring a woman and damaging three houses.

New Shelling – May 21, 2025

Sweida Governorate was bombarded with **three rockets**, believed to be Katyusha rockets. These rockets landed in open areas near the Tha'la-Suwayda road, Tal al-Hadid, and agricultural land west of the city. No casualties were reported.

In response, local factions responded to the sources of the alleged shelling, using artillery and heavy machine guns, concentrating their fire on the vicinity of the border town of Tha'la.

Subsequent Escalation – June 5 and 6, 2025

On June 5: Four mortar shells fell on the town of Ta'ara in the western countryside, wounding a civilian and causing material damage. Field sources indicate that the shells were fired from an abandoned military site near Busra al-Harir, currently used by armed tribal groups.



↑ Remains of a mortar shell from the shelling of the town of Taara in the western countryside of Sweida - June 5, 2025.



↑ Damage to a house in the town of Taara in the western countryside of Sweida as a result of mortar shells falling - June 5, 2025.

On June 6: Five mortar shells fell near the village of Barak in the eastern countryside, without recording any human or material losses, as they fell in open areas.

Humanitarian and security repercussions:

These attacks led to the expansion of armed clashes to include villages that were considered relatively stable, turning civilians into direct targets in the context of collective revenge operations. They also led to:

1. Deteriorating humanitarian conditions in a number of affected villages.
2. Electricity and water outages in some areas.
3. Difficulty of movement and road closures.
4. Damage to service centers that provided basic needs for children and women.
5. Growing community fears of a return to violence based on identity and local affiliations, in the absence of an effective institutional response from security agencies and transitional authorities.

6. Assault that had a sectarian aspect against civilians and university students after the escalation of April 2025:

The security escalation witnessed in the areas of Jaramana, Ashrafiyah Sahnaya, and the Damascus-Sweida Road in late April 2025 led to sharp societal divisions of a sectarian nature. These divisions were directly reflected in several areas and extended to educational institutions. The Syrian Network for Human Rights monitored physical and verbal assaults targeting university students from Sweida governorate at various universities across Syria. These assaults centered on their regional and sectarian backgrounds, amidst an atmosphere of societal mobilization and incitement, and a lack of immediate measures to protect them.

This reality has prompted a number of students to leave their classrooms or suspend their university attendance for fear of further attacks, amid escalating hate speech and a lack of security guarantees on campus.

In this context, several regions witnessed student and popular protests with an explicit sectarian character, particularly in some cities in southern Syria. These protests were accompanied by mobilization and incitement rhetoric based on religious and regional affiliations, further aggravating the societal environment and threatening to transform universities and educational institutions into arenas of tension and division, rather than remaining neutral and shared spaces.

Official Response

In an attempt to contain the situation, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research issued a decision on May 10, 2025, prohibiting the publication, circulation, or promotion of any content that incites sectarianism, hatred, or undermines national unity within Syrian universities. The decision applies to students, faculty members, and staff at public and private universities and higher institutes. It stipulates that violating these instructions exposes the perpetrator to legal and disciplinary accountability, with penalties that may include final dismissal or referral to the judiciary.

The decision was issued following an official meeting held on the same day, which included the Minister of Higher Education, the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Information, and the Governor of Sweida, along with a delegation of the province's dignitaries. The meeting resulted in a series of executive measures, most notably:

1. Forming student committees representing Sweida residents at various universities to coordinate with university administrations and relevant authorities.
2. Providing psychological and educational support to affected students and compensating for lost learning.
3. Allowing postgraduate studies to be completed electronically without mandatory attendance.
4. Regulating media discourse and preventing any sectarian or discriminatory incitement through official and unofficial media outlets.
5. Affirming the responsibility of security and academic institutions to ensure the safety and protection of all students without discrimination.

Minister of Information Hamza al-Mustafa affirmed in a press statement that Syrian universities will remain inclusive national institutions, rejecting their use as platforms for sectarian mobilization or threats to civil peace. He emphasized the need to hold accountable anyone who incites hatred or promotes division within society.

Fourth: The Death Toll and the Most Prominent Violations:

Based on visual documentation, field testimonies, and multiple local sources, the Syrian Network for Human Rights team monitored the following death toll and violations resulting from the security escalation witnessed in the areas of Jaramana, Ashrafiyah Sahnaya, the Damascus-Sweida Road, and a number of villages in Sweida Governorate. This occurred during the peak period of security escalation, extending from April 29 to May 4, 2025, with sporadic shelling and clashes continuing to be documented in the following weeks:

A. Total death toll in the context of the security escalation:

As of the date of this report, at least **113 people** have been documented killed, and their names and/or photos have been verified, including one child. The death toll is distributed as follows:

1. Twenty-seven members of the official security and military apparatus (Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense) were killed during clashes or as a result of attacks targeting security checkpoints and headquarters.
2. Thirty-seven people, including a child, were distributed among:
 - Civilians whose involvement in any armed activity was not proven.
 - Armed individuals from local groups outside the state, whether those who fought alongside official forces or confronted them on the ground.
3. Forty-nine people from Sweida Governorate were killed during clashes on the Damascus-Sweida Road or in villages affected by the escalation. The death toll includes:
 - Civilians.
 - Local fighters involved in armed factions with a regional or sectarian character.

Note: The total death toll includes deaths in a variety of circumstances, including direct clashes, indiscriminate shooting, excessive or disproportionate use of force, drone attacks, and cases likely to be summary executions. Some cases are still being investigated to determine the circumstances of death and accurately categorize them by perpetrator.

B. Injury toll:

The team documented at least 85 injuries, including:

1. Security and military personnel.
2. Civilians, including children and women.
3. A Syrian Arab Red Crescent volunteer.

A number of the injured sustained serious injuries and required transfer to hospitals in Damascus for treatment.

C. Detainees and Releases:

At least 112 individuals were recorded as having been detained by Public Security forces in the Sahnaya area on suspicion of participating in or supporting armed activities. Subsequently:

- At least 106 individuals were released after it was verified that they were not involved in hostilities.
- At least six individuals remained in detention as of the date of this report.
- Among those still in detention is Raji Farouj, who appeared in a video documenting his firing while stationed in a building in Ashrafiyah Sahnaya. Another video also showed him being arrested along with others.

D. Attacks on Civilian Objects:

One religious site was documented as having been targeted in the countryside of As-Suwayda Governorate, as part of armed attacks.

E. Attacks on Private Property:

- Dozens of homes and private property were damaged as a result of clashes, shelling, or direct attacks.
- At least 15 residential homes were documented as having been burned and vandalized in the village of Al-Soura Al-Kabira, following a large-scale armed incursion into the village.

Fifth: The Repercussions of Violations and Escalation on Basic Rights and the Rule of Law:

In the context of the Syrian Network for Human Rights⁰⁰⁰⁰⁰⁰⁰ monitoring of the events that took place on April 29 and 30, 2025, in the areas of Jaramana, Ashrafiyah Sahnaya, and the Damascus-Suwayda road, and based on documented field facts, a set of human rights indicators emerge that warrant evaluation, given the complexities and intertwined nature of the event, and the human and material losses it caused, including civilians, security personnel, and local armed groups.

A. Dangers of the Use of Force and Weapons in Populated Civilian Areas:

The confrontations in the aforementioned areas resulted in civilian casualties, including women and children, in addition to injuries resulting from the use of medium weapons, heavy machine guns, and mortar shells within residential neighborhoods. In this context, the principles of distinction and proportionality emerge as fundamental controls in international law, imposing strict obligations on conflicting parties to avoid unjustified harm to civilians, especially in densely populated areas. The protection of civilians is an ongoing obligation of the state, in accordance with the provisions of international human rights law, particularly Article (6) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (the right to life) and Article (9) (the right to liberty and security of person).

B. The Need for Legal Guarantees in Arrest and Detention Procedures:

Field data has shown mass arrests in a number of tense areas, followed by the release of many individuals due to lack of evidence of their direct involvement. Despite the urgent nature of security interventions in situations of tension, this does not absolve the authorities from adhering to basic legal safeguards, most notably the existence of judicial orders, the right of the detainee to know the reasons for their arrest, to appoint a lawyer, and to be protected from any form of cruel or inhuman treatment.

C. Targeting Civilian Facilities and the Risk of Uncontrolled Expansion of Violence:

Instances documented in which civilian vehicles and public facilities were targeted, whether by local armed groups or as a result of indiscriminate clashes, highlight the need to respect the principle of neutralizing vital facilities and civilians. This principle is even more important in the post-conflict transitional phase, where respect for civilians and their property is a critical indicator of the commitment of security agencies and institutions to the rule of law.

D. The Importance of the Authorities' Role in Prevention and Containment:

Despite the announcement of a ceasefire agreement on April 30, armed attacks have recurred in some areas, highlighting **the challenges of imposing stability on the ground** and preventing the spread of violence. This requires developing the capacity of state institutions, particularly security institutions, to intervene quickly and effectively, and strengthening **early warning mechanisms** and communication with local communities, thus contributing to crisis containment and protecting the population.

E. The necessity of evaluating institutional performance and enhancing transparency:

Field evidence has shown variations in the level of security and administrative response from one region to another. This calls for an objective assessment of institutional performance, with the aim of enhancing transparency and accountability within a framework that respects fundamental rights. Such an assessment contributes to rebuilding trust between institutions and society and establishing the foundations of legitimacy for the actions taken.

F. The Escalation of Sectarian Rhetoric and the Role of the Digital Space in Fueling Division:

The Network has observed a rise in the circulation of sectarian and regional incitement through the media and social media platforms, which has shifted divisions from the field to the digital space. This escalation of rhetoric has not been met with effective government measures to calm or combat hatred, exacerbating divisions within educational institutions, particularly universities, which are supposed to provide a safe and neutral environment.

Sectarian attacks have posed a direct threat to societal peace, in the absence of immediate and deterrent intervention from the relevant authorities. This underscores the need to activate oversight and accountability mechanisms within educational and media institutions and to provide legal protection to all segments of society without discrimination.

Sixth: Conclusions and Recommendations

The documented facts and violations during the recent security escalation highlight the fragility of the security structure and the dysfunctional relationship between society and the state, confirming the existence of structural challenges that hinder stability and transitional justice efforts. The following are the report's most prominent conclusions, followed by a set of practical recommendations:

Conclusions

- 1. Escalation of local violence in a fragile security environment:** Areas in the Damascus countryside, particularly Jaramana and Ashrafiyah Sahnaya, witnessed a significant escalation in armed violence, resulting from clashes between local groups, some of which are affiliated with security formations. This revealed weaknesses in local security management mechanisms and the absence of legal controls on the use of force in residential areas.
- 2. Institutional shortcomings in controlling weapons and preventing security fragmentation:** Field evidence revealed significant gaps in the ability of security institutions to curb the activity of outlaw groups or those entrusted with security tasks not legally defined. This highlights the need to restructure the security structure within a clear legal and institutional framework.
- 3. Overlapping roles between the state and local armed groups:** The overlapping roles between some security agencies and civil or regional armed groups have complicated the security landscape and led to repeated violations, some of which have taken on a retaliatory nature, given the absence of a regulatory framework governing the relationship between the state and society in the security field.
- 4. Arbitrary detentions lacking transparency and legal standards:** Mass detentions have taken place without clear legal basis or independent oversight guarantees, despite the subsequent release of a large number of detainees. This reflects the absence of a legal environment that guarantees due process and requires an urgent legal assessment.
- 5. Lack of transparency and concealment of information:** No accurate official data has been released regarding the number of victims, detainees, or damages. This has hindered verification and documentation, diminished civil society's ability to perform its role, and weakened public confidence in official bodies.
- 6. A sharp escalation in sectarian-motivated attacks:** The effects of violence have extended to educational and civic institutions, manifested in the targeting of university students on sectarian and regional grounds. This highlights the fragility of the civic space and the need to develop effective protection measures.

7. **The Israeli military intervention constituted a violation of sovereignty and exacerbated divisions:** The Israeli attacks constituted a clear violation of the UN Charter, under the pretext of protecting a social group, and contributed to fueling divisions and complicating the national path towards stability.

Recommendations:

1. **Issuing a legal framework for local security management:** Issuing transitional laws that clearly define the responsibilities of security agencies and prohibit the delegation of powers to illegal groups, ensuring professionalism and discipline in the implementation of security tasks.
2. **Reviewing the relationship between the state and local armed groups:** Evaluating any informal understandings with local groups, and working to integrate these groups—if necessary—into state institutions through legal and training channels that enhance their performance and hold them accountable.
3. **Forming an independent committee to document violations:** Establishing an interim independent committee, including representatives from civil society, to review security incidents, detentions, and violations and submit its recommendations to the competent authorities.
4. **Ensuring the freedom and legal security of detainees:** Verifying detainees' files according to fair standards, and guaranteeing their basic rights, including legal representation and communication with their families, with the immediate release of those not proven to have been involved in serious violations.
5. **Enhancing transparency and institutional communication:** Authorities are recommended to issue periodic official reports that include updated information on security incidents, the number of victims, and those arrested, thus enhancing the climate of trust and public accountability.
6. **Strengthening the role of civil society in prevention and monitoring:** Expanding areas of cooperation between civil society and official institutions to monitor violations and provide proactive recommendations that contribute to the prevention of violence.
7. **Preparing a national plan to control illicit weapons:** Developing a gradual plan to disarm weapons circulating outside the state framework, with clear implementation mechanisms, accompanied by community security programs that address the causes of weapon-carrying and support local stability.

8. **Prohibiting hate speech in public spaces:** Issuing executive instructions prohibiting the circulation or dissemination of inflammatory content in universities and the media, and forming internal oversight committees, while ensuring public accountability for violators.
9. **Diplomatic action to confront foreign military interventions:** Activate diplomatic channels with the United Nations and the Security Council to address violations of sovereignty and call for an independent international investigation into external attacks. It is also recommended to launch national programs to promote a shared public discourse and counter sectarian incitement campaigns, thus contributing to building comprehensive national unity.

Acknowledgement and Appreciation

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This documentation effort would not have been complete without the cooperation of everyone who shouldered their moral and societal responsibility to convey the voices of those affected, out of a belief in the importance of truth, the victims' right to justice and accountability, and the duty to ensure non-repetition.

The Network salutes all those who participated in the preparation of this report and affirms its continued commitment to the principles of professional documentation, working for justice, and combating impunity.



SYRIAN NETWORK
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



info@snhr.org
www.snhr.org

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