



Syria – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 2 March 2017

Information on people attacked/killed due to their race from 2015 to February 2017 by both state authorities and rebel groups.

An article from UK newspaper The Guardian quotes US Secretary of State John Kerry as follows:

“The US has declared that Islamic State is committing genocide against Christians and other minorities, amid mounting global pressure to recognise atrocities committed in Iraq and Syria as a deliberate drive to wipe out certain religious groups. US secretary of state John Kerry said that Isis, known in Arabic by its acronym Daesh, was ‘genocidal by self-proclamation, by ideology and by actions, in what it says, in what believes and in what it does’. He said: ‘In my judgment, Daesh is responsible for genocide against groups in areas under its control including Yazidis, Christians and Shia Muslims.’ Christians and members of other religious groups have been killed, tortured, raped and driven out of their homes.” (The Guardian (17 March 2016) *John Kerry: Isis is committing genocide in Syria and Iraq*)

A report from the privately-owned American media organisation National Public Radio states:

“Consider the plight of Syria's many minorities — the Christians, the Druze, the Ismailis and many others. On one hand, they face threats by extremists like the self-proclaimed Islamic State, which considers their beliefs heretical. On the other hand, joining forces with President Bashar Assad's regime could mean dangerous military deployments and antagonizing the Sunni Muslim majority. It's a life-and-death dilemma for these small communities that have come to feel ever more vulnerable. And as Syria has fractured during four years of fighting, religion has often been the dividing line. The country has been dominated by Assad's Alawite community, an offshoot of Shiite Islam that makes up about 10 percent of the population. Sunni Arabs are the majority at 65 percent, while the Kurds, also Sunnis, are 15 percent, according to Syria expert Fabrice Balanche, who directs the French research center GREMMO. The remaining minorities are less than 10 percent of the population: The Christians include the Assyrians, who still speak the ancient Aramaic language of Jesus; there are the Druze, who borrow elements of Judaism, Christianity and Islam; and the Ismailis, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, and the Shiite Muslims themselves.” (National Public Radio (NPR) (18 April 2015) *Syria's Minorities: Caught Between Sword Of ISIS And Wrath of Assad*)

A report from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in a section titled “Impact of Conflict and Violence on the Civilian Population within Syria” (paragraph 17), states:

“A particular and deepening feature of the conflict is that different parties to the conflict frequently impute a political opinion to larger groups of people, including families, tribes, religious or ethnic groups or whole towns, villages or neighbourhoods, by association. As such, members of a larger entity, without individually being singled out, become the targets for repercussions by different actors, including government forces, ISIS, and antigovernment armed groups, for reason of real or perceived support to another party to the conflict. According to consistent reports, whole communities which are perceived to be holding a particular political opinion or affiliation in relation to the conflict are targeted by aerial bombardments, shelling, siege tactics, suicide attacks and car bombs, arbitrary arrest, hostage-taking, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and extra-judicial executions. The perception of sharing a political opinion or affiliation in relation to the conflict is often based on little more than an individual's physical presence in a particular area (or the fact that he/she originates from a particular area), or his/her ethnic, religious or tribal background. The risk of being harmed is serious and real, and in no way diminished by the fact that the person concerned may not be targeted on an individual basis.” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (November 2015) *International Protection Considerations with Regard to People Fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic, Update IV*, pp.11-12)

In a section titled “Risk Profiles” (paragraph 38) this report refers to:

“Members of minority ethnic groups, including Kurds, Turkmen, Assyrians, Circassians, and Armenians.” (ibid, p.23)

The 2015 US Department of State country report on Syria, in a section titled “National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities”, states:

“Clashes between Kurdish groups and Da’esh continued during the year. In October 2014 at least 190,000 residents of the Kurdish town of Kobane fled ahead of a Da’esh offensive, according to media reports. The fighting near Kobane reportedly killed more than 650 persons. According to an HRW report, in May 2014 Da’esh abducted 153 Kurdish children when they attempted to return to Kobane after completing year-end exams in Aleppo. Coalition forces cleared Kobane of Da’esh earlier in the year, but Da’esh fighters briefly returned in June, disguising themselves as Kurdish forces to massacre approximately 250 civilians.” (US Department of State (13 April 2016) *2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Syria*, p.50)

This section of the report also states:

“The Alawite community, to which Bashar Asad belongs, enjoyed privileged status throughout the government and dominated the state security apparatus and military leadership. Nevertheless, the government reportedly also targeted Alawite opposition activists for arbitrary arrest, torture, detention, and killing. Extremist opposition groups targeted Alawite communities on several occasions for their perceived progovernment stance.” (ibid, p.50)

An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response to a request for information, in a section headed “Treatment of the Druze by President Assad's Government”, states:

“Sources report on allegations that Syrian authorities were responsible for the death, in September 2015, of Sheikh Wahid Balhous [Sheik Wahid Bul'us or Sheikh Abu Fahad Waheed al-Bal'ous], a Druze religious leader in Sweida. Sources report that Sheikh Wahid Balhous was killed by a car bomb, along with about 25 other people. The Associated Press (AP) describes Sheikh Wahid Balhous as a ‘prominent critic of President Bashar Assad, calling on youth in the Druze stronghold of Sweida province to refuse to serve in the military’. The Professor stated that the Sheikh was the leader of a group called ‘Sheikhs of Dignity,’ which considered that ‘Druzes should only bear arms to defend their regions against Sunni extremists like ISIS,’ rather than to support the regime's military in other areas of Syria. The Research Fellow describes Sheikh Wahid Balhous as the founder of a militia called “Rijal al-Karama” [Men of Dignity], which ‘has worked to protect those resisting conscription and has emphasized military service should only be voluntary’.” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (26 November 2015) SYR105355.E – *Syria: Situation of the Druze, including whether they are perceived to be loyal to President Assad by the insurgent groups; treatment by the authorities and the insurgent groups (January 2015-November 2015)*)

In a section headed “Treatment of the Druze by the Opposition Forces” this response states:

“The Research Fellow stated that, in January 2015, the Druze of Jabal al-Summaq (in the Idlib region) were compelled to issue a statement renouncing the Druze faith and converting to Sunni Islam after Jabhat al-Nusra gained control of the area. Similarly, the Swiss newspaper Le Temps reports on the [translation] ‘forced conversion’ of Druze living in the Idlib region to Sunni Islam, at the beginning of 2015. According to sources, the Jabhat al-Nusra threatened to kill the Druze if they refused to convert to Sunni Islam. The Research Fellow said that the statement also called for the destruction of Druze shrines in Jabal al-Summaq.” (ibid)

A BBC News report states:

“A recent attack on Druze villagers by radical Islamist rebels in Syria has raised fears about the fate of the country's secretive sect. At least 20 Druze were shot dead by the al-Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front in the north-western province of Idlib. It was the deadliest attack on Druze civilians since the beginning of the country's conflict four years ago. Fighting has spread to areas where Druze predominate. They are the third-largest religious minority in Syria and are considered by jihadists as heretics.” (BBC News (19 June 2015) *Syria's Druze under threat as conflict spreads*)

A report from Al Jazeera states:

“In Syria, the regime of President Bashar al-Assad is predominantly drawn from the Alawite sect, a splinter of Shia Islam, and is supported by Iran and its Lebanese ally Hezbollah, both Shia. On the other side of the battle line, most Syrian rebel groups are composed of Sunnis and are backed by the Sunni states of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan and Turkey. That leaves the region's religious minorities, facing the dilemma over whom to support to ensure survival. Among them are the Druze, who are members of an Abrahamic unitarian splinter sect of Ismaili Islam and considered heretical by both Sunni and Shia Muslims. For much of the conflict, now in its fifth year, Syria's Druze

have generally paid lip service to the Assad regime. But some Druze leaders say the community has no choice but to ally with the mainly Sunni rebel opposition, arguing that the Alawite sect, which forms the backbone of the Assad regime, cannot prevail in the long term as Sunnis comprise about 72 percent of the country's 22.5 million population. Druze account for just 3 percent. 'You can't fight the majority of Syrians who are Sunnis,' said Walid Jumblatt, leader of Lebanon's Druze community who has been urging Syrian Druze to abandon the Assad regime and reconcile with their Sunni neighbors. Others maintain that the brutal actions of groups like the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda's Syria affiliate, which view Druze as heretics, leave them no choice but to fight alongside Assad in an alliance of minorities. That explains why Syria's smaller sects, including Christians and Shias, have continued to back Assad along with the Alawites and Druze." (Al Jazeera (2 July 2015) *For Syria's Druze, survival hinges on choosing the right ally*)

An article from the Los Angeles Times states:

"This month, alarm spread among the Druze population when Nusra fighters killed at least 20 Druze in Qalb Lawzeh, a village in the northwestern province of Idlib. Other reports have indicated that the extremists had forced Druze villagers in the north to convert to the militants' ultra-fundamentalist version of Sunni Islam. During the punishing, more than four-year conflict, Druze religious leaders in Syria have generally endeavored publicly to steer a middle path, voicing support for peaceful political reform in Syria while rejecting armed rebellion. But like other Syrian minority groups, the Druze are generally viewed as supporters of the government of Assad, a member of the Alawite minority sect. The Syrian rebellion arose from the nation's Sunni majority. Minorities and secular Sunnis are key to Assad's support base. The Druze's perceived pro-government stance has made the sect a target of opposition attacks in areas like Jaramana, a strategic suburb southeast of Damascus. Dozens have been killed in Jaramana by opposition car bombs and mortar strikes. Druze militiamen from Jaramana have helped drive rebels from outlying areas." (Los Angeles Times (21 June 2015) *Syrian military and Druze allies join forces to fend off 'terrorists'*)

An Agence France Presse report refers to the Turkmen minority group as follows:

"Around 1,500 members of Syria's Turkmen minority have fled to the Turkish border to escape renewed fighting in the northwest of the country, a Turkish official said Sunday. Turkey has expressed concern in recent days over Russian air raids in the area, fearing they are aimed at hitting Syrian opposition fighters and bolstering the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. Meanwhile, Turkmen fighters backed by Turkey have launched their own ground operation in northern Syria to retake territory controlled by Islamic State (IS). 'As of today, around 1,500 of our Turkmen brothers and sisters have come to our border region,' the governor of Turkey's Hatay region on the Syrian border, Ercan Topaca, was quoted as saying by Turkish news agencies. 'Of course we are ready to meet their every need, especially as winter conditions are starting,' he said, adding that 575 tents had already been sent as well as blankets, food and medical supplies. The refugees have been fleeing to an area south of the Turkish town of Yayladagi, 50 kilometres (31 miles) from the Hatay regional capital Antakya." (Agence France Presse

(22 November 2015) *Some 1,500 Turkmen flee Syrian war for Turkey: governor*

A BBC News report states:

“Since Russia began air strikes on the Turkmen mountains in north-west Syria last month, nearly 5,000 people from the country's ethnic Turkmen minority have fled their homes. Many have crossed the border into Turkey's Hatay province, their plight overshadowed by a diplomatic row between Turkey and Russia. Twenty-five year old Surayya and her family finally left their village and fled to Hatay in the last week of November. Until recently their home in the Turkmen mountains had been a little-known corner of a wider war. But then Russian warplanes began bombing their village.” (BBC News (4 December 2015) *The Syrian Turkmen taking flight from Russian bombing*)

An article from UK newspaper The Independent states:

“Moscow is waging a relentless campaign of aerial bombardment intended specifically to ‘drive out’ the Turkmen minority from north-western Syria, the community's political leader has warned. Abdurrahman Mustafa, who as president of the Syrian Turkmen Assembly is the figurehead for the ethnic minority, accused the Russian air force of trying to purge the area in order to carve out a safe enclave for its ally, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, amid growing global pressure for an end to the conflict.” (The Independent (1 December 2015) *Syria air strikes: Russia accused of ethnic cleansing of Turkmen*)

A report from the Washington DC based Jamestown Foundation states:

“Prior to the beginning of the war in Syria, there were approximately 50,000 Circassians living within its borders. Now, according to Circassian activists, there remain no more than 20,000. Some have been killed, many are already internally displaced persons (IDP), but most of that missing 30,000 have fled abroad—the overwhelming majority to Turkey, Jordan and European countries.” (Jamestown Foundation ((15 November 2016) *In Syria, Moscow Orchestrating Another ‘Circassian Genocide’*, Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 13 Issue: 183)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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