A/HRC/59/CRP.4

11 August 2025

Arabic and English only

Human Rights Council
Fifty-ninth session

Violations against civilians in Coastal and Western Central Syria in January - March 2025

Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

Summary

The present report examines serious violations, primarily targeting Alawi communities, including a series of massacres that occurred in March 2025 in Coastal and Western Central Syria.

These areas had been tense since the fall of the previous government, seeing sporadic incidents of violence, including executions of civilians in January, alongside frequent reports of revenge killings.

The March violence was most immediately sparked by an arrest operation launched by the interim authorities on 6 March, to which so-called "remnants" of the previous government responded by capturing, killing and injuring of hundreds of interim government forces. Some 1,400 people, predominantly civilians, including approximately 100 women, were reported killed, most in massacres that ensued over a large geographic area, alongside other kinds of violence, looting, burning and displacement.

The interim government largely regained control of the situation and brought the most severe violations against civilians to an end by 10 March. However, the outpouring of violence, some of which was filmed, photographed, and disseminated by perpetrators, has deepened rifts between communities, contributing to a climate of fear amongst many Syrians. Retaliatory attacks were continuing as of the preparation of this report, amidst heightened insecurity that the interim government needs to urgently address.

These events did not occur in a vacuum. They took place against a background of rampant human rights violations and abuses, violations of international humanitarian law, war crimes and crimes against humanity committed most prominently by the former government but also by other parties on all sides of the Syrian conflict since 2011, as documented by the Commission. The conflict had divided communities geographically, following years of sieges, displacement and hardened frontlines. Across communities, Syrians have been hopeful that there would be accountability for the violations that occurred throughout the conflict. However, insufficient clarity on the new framework for justice, combined with the security vacuum led some to take the law into their own hands. The involvement of former factions, only just incorporated into the interim government's security forces, including some with well documented histories of violations and abuses during the conflict, increased the risk that violence would unfold as documented. These events also took place in a context of social media networks being used to spread disinformation and hate speech.

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The Commission found that violations, including acts that likely amount to crimes, including war crimes, were perpetrated by both pro-former government fighters (PFGFs) and interim government force members, as well as by private individuals. These acts included murder, torture, abductions, and inhumane acts related to the treatment of the dead, as well as pillage and property destruction, including related to medical facilities. In relation to members of the interim government forces and private individuals operating alongside or in proximity to them, while the killings and other acts followed a systematic pattern across multiple, widespread locations, the Commission found no evidence of a governmental policy or plan to carry out such attacks. Its findings highlight the need for clear accountability for all perpetrators, regardless of affiliation or rank, and redoubled efforts to ensure non-repetition, begin the process of reparations and gain the trust of affected communities.

As part of the preparation of this report, the Commission conducted more than 200 interviews with victims and witnesses and was granted unfettered access to the coastal areas and affected communities by the interim government as well as a range of officials.

While dozens of alleged perpetrators of violations have reportedly since been arrested by the interim government, the scale of the violence documented in this report warrants expanding such efforts. A National Inquiry was appointed by the interim President already on 9 March to examine the events. On 22 July, it preliminarily identified 298 alleged perpetrators of violations among individuals and groups within military factions, as well as 265 alleged perpetrators of violations linked to armed groups associated with the former government. Its report should pave the way for further investigations and prosecutions as well as implementation of its recommendations. The present report also contains a series of recommendations to address the violations documented, take steps to ensure non-repetition, and to provide reparations for the victims.

I. Introduction

1. This report outlines serious violations committed against civilian populations, primarily targeting Alawi communities, beginning in January 2025 and including a series of massacres that occurred in March 2025 in Coastal and Western Central Syria. The killings, violence, looting, displacement, and burning of houses that occurred – some of which were filmed and disseminated on social media, along with footage of civilians being tortured and humiliated - have deepened existing rifts between communities, contributing to a climate of fear and insecurity amongst many Syrians throughout the country. The violent 6 March attack by so-called "remnants" of the former government's forces, which triggered further clashes and a spree of attacks in which hundreds of civilians were killed over a few days in early March,[1] has now ended after the interim government's forces regained control of the area and announced an end to military operations. Retaliatory attacks are continuing however amidst a heightened climate of fear and must urgently be addressed by the interim government.

2. Following three introductory sections (I-III), this report sets out the Commission's findings regarding alleged violations in Homs and Hama between January and March 2025 (section IV) and in connection with the large-scale violence that occurred in coastal areas and Central Western Syria in March 2025 (section V). It subsequently presents the Commission's conclusions and recommendations (section VI). Annex I provides a map of the locations of the incidents detailed in this report, while Annex II contains summaries of the cases and incidents investigated hitherto by the Commission. Annex III summarizes the applicable law, and Annex IV contains copies of exchanges between the Commission and the interim government.

II. Methodology

3. For this report, the Commission received reports on over 42 incidents and investigated in depth 15 emblematic incidents in Hama, Latakia and Tartus Governorates that took place between 6 and 10 March 2025. The Commission also investigated four emblematic incidents that took place in Homs and Hama Governorates in January. More than 200 victims and witnesses were interviewed between January and May. The Commission sought information on incidents and developments from the interim authorities,[2] and analyzed, authenticated and verified documents, photographs, videos, and satellite imagery from multiple sources, including non-governmental organizations and the UN.

4. The Commission also undertook a mission to the coastal areas in June 2025, thanks to the access and facilitation granted by the interim government, during which it met with local government officials, security commanders, witnesses and victims' families. The Commission team was granted unfettered access to the coastal areas by the interim government, and to a range of officials who provided information on the government's efforts to restore calm and assuage community fears while tackling mounting security challenges, as well as ongoing efforts to properly train forces under its command. The

[1] Different sources, including civil society organizations working to collect and confirm numbers of deaths, indicate ranges up to 1,500 deaths. The aforementioned National Inquiry found that at least 1,426 people were killed, including 90 women, most of whom were civilians, and some former military personnel who had made "settlement" agreements with the interim authorities, see its 22 July press conference: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HK5aPKBazGM.

[2] A letter dated 19 May containing a request for information on the incidents under investigation for this report was sent to the interim authorities (see Annex IV). Preliminary findings were shared with the interim authorities on 23 June, in an effort to allow for further confirmation or clarification of the information gathered and to give the authorities an opportunity to fill in some of the gaps in information before the finalization of this report – particularly in regard to the challenges faced and the steps taken by the interim authorities to contain the situation, to prevent further abuses and to bring those responsible to justice. Subsequently, a document containing the bulk of this report was shared with the interim authorities and with the National Inquiry, prior to it concluding its work, on 6 July. The final report was shared with the interim government on 25 July, and it responded by letter dated 8 August (reproduced as received, see Annex IV).

team was able to visit many sites and locations where the violence had occurred, as well as three mass burial sites.

5. The standard of proof was met when there were reasonable grounds to believe that incidents occurred as described.[3] 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. Guided by the principle of "do no harm", the Commission thanks all who provided information, particularly victims and witnesses.

6. The overall scale of alleged violations is greater than the incidents and events reflected in this report. Additional incidents, particularly in Homs governorate, and in other locations in Latakia and Tartus governorates, are still under investigation.

7. On 9 March, interim President al-Sharaa announced the establishment of an independent National Inquiry to investigate atrocities committed against civilians and members of government forces during the coastal events of March 2025.[4] The Inquiry was mandated to "reveal the causes, circumstances, and conditions that led to these events; investigate the violations to which civilians were subjected; identify those responsible; examine the attacks on public institutions, security personnel, and the army; and refer those found to have committed crimes or violations to the judiciary." The Inquiry was originally required to submit its findings within 30 days of its formation,[5] but this deadline was later extended by an additional three months.[6] The Commission welcomed the establishment of the National Inquiry,[7] and was able to meet with its members later in March 2025 to exchange experiences about good practices for independent investigation.[8] A Commission team met the National Inquiry again in June 2025 to discuss preliminary findings. In early July, the Commission shared an advance document containing extracts of most of the findings in this current report with the Inquiry, to aid its important work. The National Inquiry submitted its report to President al-Sharaa on 13 July and held a press conference on 22 July during which it presented its findings. [9]

III. Context

Political developments in early 2025

8. The collapse of the Assad government on 8 December 2024 marked the end of an authoritarian government that had brutalized and killed its own people.

9. After the fall of Bashar Assad, the then-caretaker government committed to a new domestic order, grounded in the rule of law, that would safeguard citizens' individual freedoms, stating that "*a mindset of vengeance cannot build [a country].*"[10] Their public commitments to maintaining good conduct and protecting the human rights of all Syrian citizens irrespective of their ethnic or religious background were well received.[11]

10. In the weeks and months that followed, steps were undertaken to consolidate control over State institutions, unify armed groups under one command, and begin to address the many challenges facing Syria in a post-Assad era, including sectarian

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

[4] Identical letters dated 11 March 2025 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

[5] https://sana.sy/en/?p=349109

[6] https://sana.sy/en/?p=351876

[7] https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/03/syria-un-commission-calls-renewed-commitment-peace-justice-and-human-rights

[8] https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/03/un-syria-commission-welcomes-caretaker-governments-openness-country-visits

[9] https://sana.sy/en/?p=365511

[10] See e.g., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-iWCRJTww4Q

[11] See e.g. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/12/never-again-un-syria-commission-urges-incoming-authorities-break-cycle and A/HRC/58/66 para 37.

tensions. On 29 January, a "Revolution Victory Conference" was held at the Presidential Palace in Damascus, bringing together officials of the new caretaker authorities and commanders of different armed opposition groups. The conference marked the formal declaration of victory by the coalition of opposition armed groups over the Assad government and culminated in the appointment of Ahmad al-Sharaa as the interim President of the Syrian Arab Republic.

11. Following a series of local consultations across various cities and governorates in Syria, a one-day National Dialogue conference was convened by the caretaker authorities on 25 February. The conference's final statement contained a non-binding declaration which called for Syria's unity and sovereignty, the respect of human rights - including freedom of expression and women's rights - and the need to foster the participation of all segments of society in political life.

12. Two weeks later, a Constitutional Declaration was issued by President al-Sharaa, which incorporated international human rights treaties, charters and conventions as an integral part of the Constitutional Declaration and emphasized the State's commitment to unity of the land while respecting cultural specificities, and to the independence of the judiciary as well as the protection of private property.[12]

13. The new approach received broad support from Syrians in a rare poll conducted in March, despite differences in views between various groups in the country, including in relation to transitional justice, inclusivity, and the future legal system. [13] Contrary to the approach adopted by the previous government, the interim government has an opportunity to build a State for all its citizens, regardless of their gender, religion, ethnic background or political affiliation. In this regard, fostering a more inclusive governance model and gaining the trust of all Syrians will be critical in the months to come.

Initial steps towards disarmament, demobilization and security sector reform

14. Among the major tasks facing the interim authorities are ensuring disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of hundreds of thousands[14] of members of the former government's security forces; implementing transitional justice processes for crimes committed by these and other forces since 2011 in Syria; and carrying out security sector reform (SSR).

15. Following the fall of the previous government, on 9 December, the Hay'at Tahrir Al Sham (HTS)-led Military Operations Command (MOC) declared a general amnesty for all Syrian soldiers conscripted into the Syrian armed forces.[15]

16. As an initial step towards disarmament and demobilization, also in December 2024, the caretaker authorities established "settlement centres" for former members of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and affiliated security forces to turn in their weapons and settle their status. Tens of thousands of former soldiers reportedly sought to settle their individual status and hand in arms. According to local officials, in the governorates of Latakia and Tartus alone, respectively 83,000 and 40,000 individuals settled their status. Some refrained from doing so, citing fears of retribution, particularly as attacks against Alawi communities were increasingly being reported (see below and section III). Others instead joined new armed groups consisting of pro-former government forces (PFGFs) or

[12] However, there were some concerns about the concentration of power in the executive in the context of limited checks and balances.

[13] https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2025/04/02/syrians-are-still-surprisingly-upbeat

[14] See United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council, 25 March 2025, https://specialenvoysyria.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2025-03-25_secco_un_special_envoy_for_syria_mr._geir_o._pedersen_briefing_as_delivered__0.pdf

[15] https://t.me/SyrianArabNewsAgency/119101

so-called "remnants of the regime", described further below.[16] While the settlement process and the related amnesty were welcomed by many, they were also criticized by others, who feared it would lead to impunity for crimes committed during the war.

17. December thus saw the rapid dissolution of the former government's Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and multiple security agencies, potentially creating a security vacuum that the MOC and General Security forces coming from Idlib lacked capacity to address on a country-wide scale.[17]

18. From 20 December, a drive was initiated to quickly identify, train and deploy new recruits to a new, country-wide "General Security" force, tasked with performing law enforcement functions under the authority of the caretaker government's Ministry of Interior. Trainees reportedly underwent two weeks of training. In addition, many fighters previously operating under the umbrella of Hay'at Tahrir Al Sham or other former opposition armed groups were integrated into General Security, as they returned to their areas of origin. Local security officials informed the Commission of plans to extend the training periods for security personnel to ensure adequate preparation, and that studies are underway to explore vetting of security force personnel who served under the former government for possible re-recruitment.

19. Starting in December 2024, the caretaker authorities also embarked on a process of rebuilding a new army under the Ministry of Defence. Former Hay'at Tahrir Al Sham military leaders were appointed to head the Ministries of Defence and Interior in December 2024 and January 2025. On 29 January, the MOC announced the dissolution of the former government's army and security agencies. Dozens of armed factions including HTS and the Syrian National Army (SNA) factions agreed to integrate into a newly unified army under the Ministry of Defence from that date. Over the subsequent months, many factions were merged in new divisions.

20. Despite these efforts by the then caretaker authorities to build a national army with widespread support for ensuring that no weapons are held outside of the state, in February the UN Special Envoy found that many groups appeared to still exercise some or even significant autonomy, reportedly with separate revenue streams.[18]

21. Meanwhile, the integration of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and some factions in the south proved more protracted. An agreement between interim President Al Sharaa and SDF Commander Mazloum Abdi was signed on 10 March to eventually integrate all civil and military institutions in northeast Syria into the state administration. Negotiations on its implementation are ongoing. Armed groups in southern Syria, particularly in Dara'a and As-Sweida, have reportedly signalled readiness to join the unified army, while some are seeking assurances about inclusion and operational autonomy. However, the events that have erupted since 12 July in As-Sweida will have a significant impact on such efforts.[19]

22. The resulting interim government's security forces in operation during the period covered in this report consisted therefore of General Security, under the authority of the Ministry of Interior, as well as of former HTS and SNA factions, and some factions from

[16] PFGFs, often called "remnants", comprise armed elements loyal to the previous government and to its former senior commanders and who have refused to hand over weapons or settle their status. They comprise thousands of fighters, see also the below section and Annex III.

[17] After 14 years of conflict and the sudden collapse of the former government's military and security apparatus, the already vast amounts of small arms across the country reportedly increased further, see e.g. https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2025/04/syria-faces-challenge-of-disarmament/

[18] https://specialenvoysyria.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2025-02-12_secco_un_special_envoy_for_syria_mr._geir_o._pedersen_briefing_as_delivered_.pdf and https://www.syriarevisited.com/p/the-new-syrian-army-structure-and

[19] For background, see OHCHR Press Release, "Türk calls for immediate steps to ensure protection of people in Suweida and across Syria", 18 July 2025, available at https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/07/turk-calls-immediate-steps-ensure-protection-people-suweida-and-across-syria. See also, COI Syria, "UN Syria Commission deeply alarmed by Suwayda violence, urges de-escalation, civilian protection and respect for human rights", 15 July 2025, available at https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/07/un-syria-commission-deeply-alarmed-suwayda-violence-urges-de-escalation.

the southern governorates who were under the formal authority of the Ministry of Defence as of 29 January, while in practice still operating with a degree of autonomy.

23. In Latakia and Tartus Governorates, before 6 March, the deployment of government security forces was reportedly limited to a few hundred personnel, in addition to under 2,000 Ministry of Defence allied forces stationed in these areas.

Pro-Former Government Forces (PFGFs) or so-called "remnants"

24. Between December 2024 and February 2025, violent clashes occurred between the interim authorities' security forces mentioned above and the so-called "remnants" of pro-former government forces (PFGFs). These often occurred in the context of "combing operations" by the interim authorities' security forces, aimed at disarming or arresting members of the former government's security forces who refused to hand in their weapons at settlement centres, or at arresting suspected perpetrators of crimes committed during the previous government.

25. One such confrontation occurred on 25 December, in Kherbet Elma'za village in Tartus countryside, reportedly triggered by General Security seeking to arrest former SAA Major General Muhammad Kanjo Hassan, a former judge of the Military Field Court in Qaboun suspected of sentencing thousands of prisoners to hanging in Sednaya military prison. Clashes ensued, including an ambush by "remnants" which reportedly killed 14 General Security members. Meanwhile, the circulation of an old video showing the burning of a significant Alawi shrine in Aleppo fuelled demonstrations in Tartus and other areas. Initially minor, these protests intensified as news of the Kherbet Elma'za ambush spread, further escalating tensions.

26. One day later, forces under the command of a former National Defence Forces commander who had threatened to take revenge on the interim authorities, clashed with caretaker government security forces in Balqasa village, northern Homs countryside and he was killed. A group of "remnants" led by Bassam Hossam El-Din reportedly attacked barracks of the caretaker authorities' security forces in Eastern Latakia on 13 January. The attack reportedly resulted in the killing of two General Security members and the kidnapping of seven others before they were rescued and Bassam Hossam El-Din reportedly blew himself up.[20]

27. In the incidents described above, "remnants", led by former senior military commanders, carried out coordinated attacks against interim government forces. These groups initially lacked a centralized command structure and did not seem to operate under any known hierarchical organization, and it is unclear to what extent the fighters followed orders or maintained internal discipline. The clashes that erupted on 6 March, however, indicate a higher level of coordination, as orders appeared to be followed for a brief period. While publicly available information concerning PFGFs is scarce, the "Military Council for the Liberation of Syria,"[21] claimed responsibility for operations against the interim authorities on 6 March. Its stated objectives include the *"full liberation of Syrian territory from all occupying and terrorist forces."* There are indications that the Military Council for the Liberation of Syria may have been supported by the former commander of the Desert Falcons as well as by one of the supporters of the former SAA 25th Division. Another PFGF, the "Coastal Shield Brigade,"[22] was announced shortly before 6 March. While the PFGFs have not retained their previous structure or names, the composition of new groups may reflect earlier dynamics, where the Assad government security forces were formed from a mix of military and intelligence elements. Together these groups reportedly comprised at least 2000 fighters.

[20] https://sana.sy/en/?p=344523

[21] Led by Ghiath Dalla, former commander of the SAA 42nd Brigade of the 4th Tank Division and Al-Ghayath Forces

[22] Led by Migdad Faitaha.

Additional security challenges including incitement and hate speech

28. The above rise in insecurity coincided with additional violence and actions by external actors that threatened to destabilize the political transition in Syria. Israel regularly conducted airstrikes on Syrian territory, destroying the military capacities of the Syrian army, and expanded its occupation of additional Syrian territory. Da'esh maintained a threatening presence, reportedly escalating attacks and trying to exploit the post-Assad security vacuum to expand recruitment.

29. In addition, social media networks fuelled sectarianism and hate speech, including by spreading false information, hate speech, and incitement against Alawis, in posts reportedly often originating from abroad.

30. Fuelled by such hate speech, harassment and violations against the Alawi community started to rise, including killings, abductions, looting or occupation of property, with almost daily reports of such violations affecting Alawi citizens. Reports of harassment and arbitrary arrests during combing campaigns and at checkpoints became more frequent, with Alawis asked questions about their sectarian identity and derogatory terms such as *"nusayri"* and *"Alawi pigs"* being used to refer to them.

The situation of the Alawis in Syria

31. The Alawi minority, estimated to comprise around one tenth of the Syrian population, has occupied a disproportionately prominent position within the Syrian state, particularly in the military and intelligence sectors. This structural imbalance was most evident under the Assads, whose successive governments relied heavily on Alawi loyalty to maintain power and suppress dissent through the military and intelligence apparatus.[23]

32. The roots of Alawi ascendancy in Syria's coercive institutions can be traced to the French Mandate period (1920–1946), during which colonial authorities implemented a policy of divide and rule. This strategy fragmented the Syrian polity along sectarian and regional lines, creating separate administrative entities—including an Alawi State—and disproportionately recruiting Alawis into the colonial military.

33. By the time Hafez al-Assad assumed power through a military coup in 1970, Alawis had become deeply embedded in the security apparatus, estimated to constitute over two thirds of Syria's career soldiers and officer corps—figures that far exceeded their demographic share. This overrepresentation contributed to widespread perceptions that the Alawi community, as a whole, was complicit in authoritarian repression.

34. However, such generalizations obscure important internal heterogeneity. While key positions in the former government were occupied by individuals from prominent Alawi families—often tied to the Assad clan—many Alawis remained marginalized, economically disadvantaged, and politically disenfranchised. Rural areas of the Alawi heartland, such as Latakia and Tartus governorates, continued to suffer from underdevelopment and limited state services.

35. Successive Assad governments actively cultivated a narrative of existential threat to the Alawi community. Especially after the 2011 uprising, the former government positioned itself as the last line of defence against annihilation at the hands of a predominantly Sunni opposition and extremist groups engaged in sectarian rhetoric and violence against Alawis, contributing to a siege mentality within the community. As a result, for many Alawis, continued support for the Assads' governments was less an

[23] See the Commission's reports on human rights violations by the security apparatus since 2011, available at https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria/documentation, including most recently A/HRC/58/CRP.3, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/01/web-agony-un-commissions-report-unveils-depths-former-governments-detention .

expression of ideological affinity and more a perceived necessity for communal survival.[24]

36. The Alawi community's entanglement with state power thus reflects a complex interplay of historical marginalization, strategic co-optation, and perceived existential insecurity. The former government succeeded in leveraging sectarian dynamics to consolidate authoritarian rule, but in doing so, it also deepened societal fragmentation and laid the groundwork for future cycles of violence and retaliation.

37. On the economic front, the announcement of the dissolution of the former government's army and security agencies[25] resulted in hundreds of thousands of members of the Alawi community finding themselves with no income to take care of their families, a decision that would begin fuelling economic and social grievances. This coincided with the dismissal of thousands of public sector employees across government institutions, including in the health sector, as well as the closure of medical centres in the coastal countryside. These layoffs, while occurring nationwide, disproportionately affected the coastal region, which was historically reliant on public sector employment**.**

IV. The lead up to the March 2025 events

38. In the lead up to the March violence, the lack of clarity on the new framework for justice (that would replace the flawed system inherited from the previous government),[26] coupled with the security vacuum, contributed to an atmosphere where victims and survivors of past crimes and violations may have been tempted to take the law into their own hands, carry out retributive attacks and settle scores, instead of seeking reconciliation.

39. Such retaliatory attacks, following the collapse of the former government, grew out of five decades of increased structural sectarianism, weakened rule of law, social fragmentation and entrenched grievances from the systematic crimes perpetrated by Assad's security forces with impunity, including torture, enforced disappearances, rape and other forms of sexual violence, chemical attacks and massacres of civilians.[27] These primarily affected the majority Sunni Muslim population.[28] Some towns, such as Baniyas, which had a legacy of sectarian strife and had witnessed previous massacres, saw more elevated levels of violence.

40. In the months leading up to the March violence, the number of incidents of what can be described as revenge attacks or killings was on the rise. These included a series of incidents in Homs and Hama governorates in early 2025, which occurred in the context of official "combing operations" across Homs governorate, starting with Homs city and expanding to eastern and western rural Homs. The Commission has documented four such incidents, including two occurring in the villages of Fahel and Mreimin, summarized below.[29]

41. These occurred in the context of a campaign conducted on 21 and 23 January by security forces affiliated to the caretaker authorities, including General Security forces, allegedly targeting "outlaw elements*"* in north-western rural Homs.

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[24] See e.g. Michael Kerr, and Craig Larkin (eds). *The Alawis of Syria: War, Faith and Politics in the Levant*; and Loubna Mrie, "Bashar al-Assad Exploited Alawis' Fear", *The Atlantic*, 20 December 2024.

[25] https://sana.sy/en/?p=345609 ; https://specialenvoysyria.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2025-02-12_secco_un_special_envoy_for_syria_mr._geir_o._pedersen_briefing_as_delivered_.pdf

[26] See e.g. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/01/web-agony-un-commissions-report-unveils-depths-former-governments-detention cited above.

[27] See the Commissions reporting since 2011 available at https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria/documentation including A/HRC/46/54 ("Retrospective report" covering 2011-2020).

[28] Idem, see for instance: Web of Agony, Arbitrary Detention, Torture, and Ill-Treatment by former Government forces in the Syrian Arab Republic (Companion Report to A/HRC/46/55), para. 96: "The vast majority of those arrested and detained by pro-Government forces were adult men from the Sunni Arab population."

[29] The Commission also investigated incidents in Anz and Arzet villages, Hama Governorate in January 2025, see Annex II Section II.

42. Fahel and Mreimin villages are located near Sunni-majority Al Houla areas, which witnessed a series of massacres in 2012 where at least a hundred people, including dozens of women and children, were summarily executed.[30] Some prominent members of the former government security forces, including former high-ranking officers from military security, are reportedly residents of Fahel and Mreimin.

43. On 23 January, General Security members conducted a combing campaign in Fahel. Twenty-one male residents were detained during raids, 14 were killed, including several former SAA high-ranking officers, and many houses were looted. Seven men were subsequently released in late January from Homs Central Prison following community negotiations with local authorities.

44. On the same day, General Security members raided the village of Mreimin and beat and tortured residents, looted multiple houses, and killed two civilians who had been affiliated with the former government's security services. At least one Mreimin resident detained in the raid was subsequently released from Homs central prison.

45. Killings were also reported on the same day in the nearby villages of Kherbet Elhamam, Al Ghazila, Kherbet Al Tin and Al Qabu. Reports by local groups claimed that up to 53 men were arbitrarily detained across Rural Western Homs on 23 January.

46. On 24 January, the State-run SANA news agency issued a report condemning violations in Mreimin and stating that a specialized committee will be formed to assess damages and provide compensation to those affected.[31]

47. Subsections II.A-D in Annex II provide further details of the alleged violations investigated in four locations in January. As described in the case summaries there, the Commission has reasonable grounds to believe that interim government forces, including elements of General Security, arbitrarily deprived individuals of their right to life and inflicted severe pain and suffering, both physical and mental, on individuals for the purposes of punishment, intimidation, or discrimination in violation of international human rights law. This occurred in in Anz on 27 January 2025 and Arzet on 31 January 2025. Members of General Security also arbitrarily detained individuals in Fahel and in Mreimin on 23 January, violating the right to liberty of person.[32]

V. Large-scale violence in coastal areas and Central Western Syria in March 2025

48. It is against the background of increased tensions that, in early March 2025, Syria's coastal region, as well as Homs and Hama, experienced violent clashes between PFGFs, various armed groups and the new General Security forces, followed by a wave of massacres of civilians.

A. The attacks on 6 March that triggered the violence

49. The large-scale violence in the coastal areas in early March was triggered by an attack occurring during the afternoon of 6 March, when former pro-government forces (PFGFs) reportedly attacked members of General Security and Ministry of Defence forces in Beit Ana, near the Latakia-Tartus highway, Latakia Governorate. Information indicates that the attack killed four General Security members and injured 15 others who were seeking to arrest an individual associated with the former government in Al Daliya. A subsequent attack by PFGFs on reinforcements sent to the area killed another 18 members. Following this, caretaker government forces - reportedly consisting of General Security and reinforced by Ministry of Defence personnel - launched a security operation in Beit Ana and nearby Al Daliya village, cordoning off the area in order to pursue those

[30] A/HRC/20/CRP.1

[31] https://www.sana.sy/?p=2184959

[32] Should these acts have sufficient nexus to the armed conflict, they would also amount to violations of international humanitarian law and may amount to war crimes.

responsible. Helicopter gunships and artillery were reportedly used in the operation in Al Daliya.

50. According to local security officials, within the first hours of the initial attack, reinforcement forces sent from the Naval Academy in Jablah came under attack by PFGFs and were surrounded at the Al-Qardaha and Hmeimim bridges along the M1 highway. Security forces were also surrounded on the main road between Latakia and Jablah, as well as at the Naval Academy, and at the security centre in Al-Qardaha. Several villages near Jablah were similarly besieged. Security forces were also surrounded by PFGFs at the Jablah police station, at Al-Qardaha police station, at the Jablah Criminal Security Branch and at Brigade 107 in Zama, near Jablah. PFGFs in Daatour neighbourhood also surrounded the security and military forces there. PFGFs further deployed along the road from Jablah to Al-Daliya.

51. The Director of the Public Security Department in Latakia governorate announced on that same day that following a "deliberate attack" by PFGFs in Jablah city and its surroundings, "forces in the governorate have been fully mobilized" and that reinforcement forces from other governorates, in addition to forces under the Ministry of Defence joined them.[33] Units from Ahrar al-Sham, Al-Amshat, Al-Hamzat, Sultan Murad, and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (Othman Brigade and Muawiyah Brigade) joined the operation, in addition to the 400th Division in Latakia, and the 56th Division in Tartus. PFGFs ambushed General Security, and clashes erupted between the two sides in several places in Rif Jablah alongside the M1 highway and surrounding areas, reportedly leading to the death of around 175 General Security members and a reported 61 members of the 400th Division. PFGFs launched attacks on several military and security sites including checkpoints and patrols in Jablah, and by early afternoon clashes had spread to Jablah bridge. Attacks on government forces were also later reported along the Homs-Tartus highway. In response to these developments, protests against the authorities' security operation in Al Daliya erupted in several locations including in Tartus city and the Al Daatour neighbourhood in Latakia. Several counter-protests in support of the caretaker authorities were also held in cities across the country

52. By late evening, PFGFs had blocked several roads and taken control of key locations including the Naval Academy, areas near the Russian Hmeimim Air Base, and the 107th Regiment base. PFGFs were stationed in buildings opposite to the Naval Academy, and armed with machine guns, in addition to snipers. Consistent with this, witnesses reported hearing gunshots from the direction of the highway and the Naval Academy, where several military divisions – the former SNA Al Hamza division, the former SNA Sultan Suleiman Shah Brigade, and Nour Al Zinki - were reportedly present, and near a bridge, where the Sultan Suleiman Shah Brigade reportedly operated a checkpoint.

53. The attacks in Jablah took place 30 minutes before clashes started in Tartus. In response to the attacks, reinforcements were requested from Latakia and Tartus. Officials reported that a convoy was sent but was ambushed en route to Jablah. Within a short period, most security forces in Tartus, Qadmous, Safita, Drakish, Sheikh Badr and Baniyas found themselves besieged.

54. PFGFs continued attacks on security personnel, with one interviewee witnessing a checkpoint established near Bisaysin, an Alawi-populated village, where armed individuals had gathered. PFGFs reportedly established a presence in several locations in Jablah city, including Jbeibat and Al Naqa, and armed Sunni and Alawi civilians clashed in the city including, according to reports, near Al Farwa Street.

55. PFGFs also captured security personnel. Syrian security officials and rescue services reported that nine General Security personnel were taken prisoner in Tartus governorate and later found dead in a remote area, with mutilated bodies and hands restrained, days after clashes ended. Local security officials also reported that 11 General Security members were killed by PFGFs in Qardaha on 6 March, following their

[33] مدير إدارة الأمن العام في محافظة... - وزارة الداخلية السورية | Facebook

negotiated surrender. Six bodies were later recovered from a mass grave in Qardaha. Two bodies were found nearby, while another three remained unaccounted for, according to local security commanders who met with the Commission. Several dozen security officials, including General Security members and police officers, were reportedly captured also in Drakish by PFGFs. At least two of them were reportedly killed, including a security official whose body was reported found in a remote area near Drakish in early June.

56. According to the caretaker authorities, at least six hospitals in Latakia and Tartus governorates were also affected in the context of the broader PFGFs attack in the Jablah area. The Commission's investigations showed that PFGF fighters shot at or near hospitals in Jablah, Baniyas, and the Tishrine University hospital and a blood bank in Latakia. The hospitals themselves did not sustain significant structural damage, but fighting disrupted medical services for two weeks.

57. For instance, on 6 March, at around 7 p.m., the Jablah national hospital was surrounded by these fighters until the evening on 7 March. At the same time, PFGFs stormed the Al Nour private hospital, also in Jablah, and prohibited medical staff inside from leaving the facility until late afternoon on Friday, 7 March. PFGFs forced medical staff to treat their injured fighters and stored ammunition inside the facility. Medical services were disrupted for several days.

58. In other incidents investigated by the Commission involving PFGF fighters, a journalist was abducted and beaten for several hours, and another media professional was shot by PFGF fighters. Both had travelled to the highway to document and report on the evolving security situation after fighting erupted on 6 March.

59. These incidents are described in further detail in Annex II, subsections I.A and I.B. Multiple other alleged violations, including murder, remain under investigation.

B. Calls for mobilization on 6-8 March

60. In response to the above events, on 6 March, at 5.44 p.m., SANA announced that "large military reinforcements are heading to Jablah to support public security forces and restore stability in the region".[34] By 5.15 p.m., the Tartus-Latakia highway was closed, and a curfew was imposed across towns and villages by the interim authorities from 7 p.m. until 7 a.m. the next day.[35]

61. Forces then streamed into the coast from other parts of Syria - including forces under the control of, or affiliated or at least nominally associated with the caretaker Ministry of Defence, including foreign fighters,[36] in addition to unaffiliated groups taking up arms spontaneously. Serious armed confrontations ensued, resulting in significant numbers of casualties among the warring parties.

62. Disturbingly, several Telegram channels, for instance one channel posing as the MOC with over 70,000 followers, deployed explicitly sectarian language (the derogatory term *"nusayri")* in communications. As mobilized armed men began to arrive in the coastal region, this channel began to deliver explicit and derogatory sectarian threats against Alawis.[37]

63. According to witnesses, during the night of 6 March and into the early hours of 7 March, calls for a religious mobilization and *nafir a'amm* were disseminated broadly on

[34] See "A defence ministry official told SANA: Huge military reinforcements are heading to Jablah to support public security forces and restore stability in the region", 6 March, 2025, See https://sana.sy/?p=2196039. See also https://t.me/SyrianArabNewsAgency/124261

[35] https://web.telegram.org/a/#-1001049481751

[36] See e.g. https://t.me/sana_gov/124261 and https://t.me/sana_gov/124262.

[37] For instance, at 2.38 a.m. on 7 March, the channel posted a video showing that: "waves of convoys continue to flow to the Syrian coast" with audio saying: "we are coming for you Alawi pigs" and stating that the fighters were 40 kilometres from Tartus. Two hours later, the same channel announced: "the harvest morning begins now in Tartus." Later, at 11.29 a.m., the same impostor channel purporting to be an official MOC telegram channel posted a video showing captured people being forced onto their hands and knees and made to bark like dogs. Ten minutes later, at 11.39 a.m., it issued a communication stating that they had "thwarted the nusayri coup."

social media, as well as through loudspeakers from local mosques in several cities, including in Hama, Homs, Latakia, Baniyas, Jablah and Aleppo. Such calls, infused with sectarian rhetoric, appeared to have been directed against the Alawi population at large, and seem to have been understood by many as a religious call for mobilization requiring immediate action rather than a conventional call for military recruitment.

64. That same night, on 7 March at 00:40 a.m., possibly indicative of related perceived risks and the need to calm the situation, the Ministry of Interior issued a statement urging civilians to stay away from the areas of military and security operations. While the statement expressed understanding of popular anger and commended the high patriotic spirit of the people, it stressed that it was imperative to respect the law, refrain from incitement, protect civilians and public and private property, and safeguard Syria's unity.[38]

65. On the next day, 7 March, at around 1 p.m., security forces, including from the Ministry of Defence,[39] began what the caretaker authorities referred to as "combing operations" throughout the region[40] targeting the "remnants".[41]

66. According to the interim authorities, a large number of volunteers sought to join the defence forces, despite the interim authorities having called on civilians to refrain from taking up arms and emphasized that it could contain the insurgency.[42] An interior ministry official later stated that "individual violations" had been committed by "unorganized elements."[43]

67. In response to the mounting violence, interim President al-Sharaa addressed the nation in the afternoon of 7 March, calling on "insurgents to lay down their arms and surrender," and stressing that anyone who attacks defenceless civilians and holds people to account for the crimes of others will be held strictly accountable.[44]

68. On 9 March, in a second speech given as information about massacres began to emerge, the interim President announced the formation of the above-mentioned National Inquiry and High-Level Committee to Maintain Civil Peace. The interim authorities emphasized that these committees would operate impartially, identify those responsible, and recommend measures to prevent further violence. Officials with whom the Commission met informed the team of these efforts and of serious abuses against civilians for which affected families will need redress.

C. Overview of ensuing alleged violations

69. The Commission conducted investigations into gross human rights violations committed in 16 locations in March 2025 in Latakia, Tartus, Homs and Hama governorates populated primarily by the Alawi minority.[45] Summaries of what happened in these locations are presented in Annex II, subsection I. The Commission received further information indicating that violations were committed in at least 27 other locations, suggesting that the scope and scale of harm may be much greater than the Commission has so far been able to verify and document in full.[46]

[38] https://t.me/SyrianArabNewsAgency/124325
[39] https://web.telegram.org/a/#-1001389119898
[40] https://x.com/SanaAjel/status/1897983691369910570
[41] https://web.telegram.org/a/#-1001049481751
[42] Identical letter mentioned above, dated 11 March 2025
[43] https://t.me/SyrianArabNewsAgency/124380
[44] https://sana.sy/en/?p=348926
[45] These include attacks by PFGFs on (1) medical facilities as well as (2) on the Jablah-Tartus highway, in addition to subsequent attacks in connection with combing operations in (3) Jablah, (4) Latakia and (5) Tartus cities and surrounding villages in Latakia and Tartus governorates, including: (6) Shir, (7) Snobar, (8) Ain Al Arous, (9) Mokhtariyeh, (10) Al Qabu Al-Awamiyah, (11) Arzona, (12) Barmaya, (13) Hattaniya and (14) the Al Qusoor neighbourhood of Banias city, plus incidents in (15) Tal Salhab and (16) Rasafa, both in Hama Governorate. A simultaneous incident in the Al Qadam neighbourhood of Damascus has also been investigated. The Commission did not find any evidence of Christian communities having been targeted during the attacks in March documented in this report.
[46] These locations are listed in Table 1 in Annex II.

70. The alleged perpetrators of the violations include hitherto unidentified armed individuals, some of whom spoke in Syrian dialects from Idlib, Homs, Hama, Dara'a, Sunni-populated neighbourhoods in Latakia, while others appeared to be foreign fighters. They also include known members of the former SNA Sultan Suleiman Shah Brigade, former SNA Al Hamza division, Sultan Murad Brigade, Ahrar al Sham, and former HTS brigades, among other groups affiliated with the Ministry of Defence, some of whom also wore military attire without identifying insignia. The General Security, who were initially under attack in several locations in Latakia and Tartus governorates, saw their numbers reduced due to related casualties, but appeared to have been present in or around the Al Qusoor neighbourhood of Baniyas, the Al Daatour and Al Thawra highway neighbourhoods of Latakia city, Snobar and Shir villages during the attacks. Multiple witnesses recounted seeing teenage boys taking part in attacks, including in Anz, Snobar and Al Qabu Al Awamiyah.

71. Armed individuals filmed themselves committing serious human rights violations, including severe beatings and executions, or while walking alongside dead bodies scattered on the street. These acts – in addition to their wide dissemination on social media - contributed to heightened fear within the Alawi community, reflecting a perceived climate of impunity.

72. The Commission found that groups of armed men conducted door-to-door house raids wearing a range of uniforms, often with no identifying insignia or in civilian clothes, and frequently with their faces concealed by masks. Victims and witnesses consistently reported being threatened, including by death, by such armed men as they arrived in cities and villages.

73. In the majority of the cases investigated by the Commission, perpetrators consistently asked civilians whether they were Sunni or Alawi, and sometimes also questioned them about whether they had held positions within the former Syrian Armed Forces. Alawi men and boys were then taken away to be executed, often several male relatives within the same families. Multiple survivor accounts indicated that, prior to being executed, victims were subjected to dehumanizing verbal abuse explicitly referencing the Alawi sect, including "*Alawi pigs*," "*kuffar*", and "*dogs*." Most victims were men of Alawi background, aged between 20 to 50 years, though women and children as young as one year old were also killed during house raids. In the cities of Latakia, Jablah and Tartus and in Snobar village, witnesses described instances whereby family members were spared after answering questions about Islamic identity and practices.

74. In cases documented by the Commission, eyewitness accounts, coupled with photographs and videos, indicated that the victims were primarily shot in the head or chest. Some were taken to the roof of their building to be shot.. The men of families were killed during house-to-house operations, possibly indicative of targeted operations against them as a group rather than an operation against individual "remnants". According to family members, victims mostly held civilian professions. The victims were also predominantly killed in Alawi neighbourhoods in mixed villages or in localities where the Alawi minority was known to predominantly reside, suggesting sectarian motivated targeting, alongside possible retaliatory motives related to perceived political affiliation or previous mandatory military service.

75. In some cases, armed individuals also looted homes and seized valuables as well as vehicles, for instance in Snobar, Baniyas, Shir and Mokhtariyeh (see the case summaries and the table of Annex II). Most victims reported that the first item to be stolen was their mobile phones. Homes were successively looted, with multiple separate groups of armed men arriving one after the other until there was "nothing left to loot." Houses and shops were damaged and, in some cases, set on fire or destroyed. Agricultural lands and warehouses were also set on fire. Victims also described widespread electricity outages and lack of internet connection which further isolated them and their families, and obstructed the flow of information, including prior to, or during the raids.

76. In the aftermath of the killings, ongoing hostilities and fear of reprisal prevented families from collecting and burying their dead in accordance with religious rites. Families were forced to keep the bodies of their killed loved ones inside their homes for

days. In other cases, bodies were left on the streets and only collected days later to be buried in mass graves. In Jablah and in Baniyas, hospitals became overwhelmed as corpses piled up, including due to an attack by PFGFs on six medical facilities in Latakia and Tartus governorates. In cases documented by the Commission, in the villages of Rasafa, Shir and Mokhtariyeh, armed individuals threatened and intimidated families while they interred their loved ones in the yards of their homes. Bodies were buried in mass graves in multiple locations, while witnesses in Baniyas, Hattaniya, Shir and Snobar villages described seeing armed individuals transporting and/or burning bodies of the dead. During its visit to Latakia and Tartus, the Commission visited recent mass burial sites in Mokhtariyeh, Snobar and Al Qusoor, reportedly holding hundreds of bodies.

77. Except for two documented cases, families interviewed by the Commission have still not been provided with a medical or a forensic report to attest to the cause of death, nor have they been able to obtain a death certificate. Civil registry offices across the country were reported to have ceased issuing birth and death certificates since the fall of the previous Syrian government. Further delays risk hampering avenues for potential accountability and redress. Except for some witnesses who were interviewed by the National Inquiry established by the interim government, most witnesses interviewed by the Commission were not aware of any investigations or arrests by the local authorities of those allegedly responsible.

78. The above events were frequently documented by both victims, witnesses, and alleged perpetrators, through photos and videos posted on social media. Some of this content, analysed and verified by the Commission, depicts human rights violations, including beatings and executions of men, allegedly perpetrated by armed men in military attire, without insignia. The Commission verified and geolocated videos in the towns of Jablah, Snobar, Mokhtariyeh and Shir, as well as such as in Baniyas and Jablah countryside. Most of the content analysed by the Commission was found on Telegram, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, or Instagram.

79. Worryingly, these events have since caused mass displacement from these areas. Thousands fled their hometowns and villages towards nearby mountains or to neighbouring Lebanon. Over 40,000 people fled into Lebanon between March and May 2025.[47] Others fled to Russia's Hmeimim air base, with Russia confirming on 13 March that it was providing shelter for 8,000 to 9,000 displaced Alawis and calling on Syrian leaders to "stop the bloodshed."[48]

80. The Commission acknowledges President al-Sharaa's commitment to hold those responsible for these violations accountable.[49] The Commission was also apprised of efforts in several locations to prevent violence against civilians. For instance, instructions were issued on the protection of civilians as mentioned above; curfews were established; and in the city of Tartus, checkpoints were established around the city to prevent the entry of armed individuals. As a result, the city was spared the violence seen elsewhere.

81. At the time of finalizing this report, the Commission continued to receive information about ongoing violations in many of the affected areas, including continued looting, housing, land and property violations, as well as abductions, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances. Harassment, threats, beatings, sectarian slurs and humiliation of Alawi men also continued in Jablah and neighbourhoods in Latakia cities. In some towns, General Security forces have succeeded in establishing working relationships with

[47] https://reporting.unhcr.org/syria-situation-crisis-regional-flash-update-28

[48] While most civilians had left the base by June, reportedly, PFGF fighters and commanders were still present until July.

[49] "We affirm that we will hold accountable, with firmness and without leniency, all those involved in the bloodshed of civilians or who harmed our people, those who exceeded the state's authority or exploited power for their own interests. No one will be above the law, and all those whose hands are stained with Syrian blood will face justice sooner rather than later," President al-Sharaa stressed", speech by President of the Syrian Arab Republic on the recent developments in the Syrian coast, SANA, 10 March 2025, available at https://sana.sy/en/?p=349169. See also, Presidential decision to form an independent national committee to investigate the events of the Syrian Coast", SANA, 9 March 2025, available at https://sana.sy/en/?p=349109, and also https://t.me/SyrianArabNewsAgency/124380

community leaders, helping to restore a sense of calm and reassure local residents. In other areas, however, their presence, perceived as outsiders to the governorate, has instilled fear among the population, particularly among women, who reported feeling unsafe walking in the streets. Some Alawi women told the Commission that they felt compelled to become veiled to conceal their sectarian identity and avoid harassment or intimidation. The violations, and fear of more, are triggering further displacement, affecting survivors of the events in March as well as other members of the Alawi minority, many of whom have fled to other parts of Syria or sought refuge abroad.

D. Legal findings

82. Regarding the applicable international legal framework, although the previous government collapsed in December 2024, it is reasonable to hold that, during the violence in coastal areas in March 2025, an armed conflict not of an international nature was taking place in the Syrian Arab Republic between the interim Government and PFGFs (see Annex III on the applicable law).[50] This would entail the applicability of international humanitarian law to these events. At the same time, international human rights law also remained applicable, with such obligations attaching to the Syrian Arab Republic and its interim government as arise from treaty obligations and customary international law, and as acknowledged in the interim government's Constitutional Declaration.[51]

83. In relation to the events that took place in March 2025, as detailed in case summaries below in Annex II, there are reasonable grounds to believe that individual members of certain factions of the security forces of the interim government - including General Security Forces, 62nd Division (formerly SNA Sultan Suleiman Shah Brigade, also known as Amshat), 76th Division (formerly SNA Al-Hamza division also known as Hamzat faction), Ahrar al Sham, and the 400th Division (that consists of former HTS brigades) - as well as private individuals participating in hostilities engaged in acts that amounted to violations and international humanitarian law, including acts that may amount to war crimes, as well as serious violations of international human rights law.[52] Further, acts and omissions described in this report likely amount to crimes under the domestic legislation of the Syrian Arab Republic for interim government forces, PFGFs, and private individuals.

84. In particular, individual members of certain factions and units as well as private individuals committed killings and torture, 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 in multiple locations in early March. Such acts, which may amount to war crimes, occurred in Jableh, Shir, Daatour, Al Qusoor, Mokhtariyeh, Tartus, Al Qabu, Snobar, Tal Salhab, Rasafa, Arzet, and Ain al Arous (as detailed in each specific case summary). 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. Additionally, in these locations, the interim government did not fulfil its obligation to exercise due diligence and protect the right to life and ensure freedom from torture and ill-treatment by preventing private individuals from committing such acts.[53]

85. Individual members of certain factions and units, as well as private individuals, also deprived individuals of liberty in violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. These acts occurred in in Jablah, Shir, Hattaniya, Daatour, Al Qusoor, Mokhtariyeh, Tartus, Al Qabu, Snobar, Tal Salhab, Rasafa, Arzet, and Ain al Arous, as set out in each specific case summary. This also invoked the interim

[50] 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.

[51] Constitutional Declaration of 12 March 2025, Article 12, available at https://sana.sy/?p=2198312.

[52] The Commission continues its investigations into allegations concerning the commission of violations by members of other units and factions.

[53] 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.

government's human rights obligations in regard to the failure to exercise due diligence to prevent such reasonably foreseeable deprivations of liberty from occurring.

86. There are also reasonable grounds to believe that individual elements of the same security forces engaged in conduct that violated the international humanitarian law prohibition against adverse distinction founded on religion or faith and committed outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment. Such acts were documented in Daatour, Al Qusoor, Mokhtariyeh, Tartus, Al Qabu, Snobar, Rasafa, Arzet and Ain al Arous as set out in the case summaries. [54] In particular, outrages upon personal dignity included instances where the dead were desecrated, through burning bodies, stepping on the dead, or both, mutilation of the dead, as well as instances where perpetrators took videos of themselves mocking the bodies of their victims and rejoicing in their death and posting the videos online. It also included instances where perpetrators deliberately prevented people from burying their relatives so that their bodies decomposed on the street and in people's homes. Such conduct 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 violations of the duty to protect life under the right to life, and the rights to respect for freedom of religion and belief due to the impairment of families to bury their dead in accordance with religious and cultural traditions.[55]

87. Through extensive looting of private property in Daatour, Al Qusoor, Mokhtariyeh, Tartus, Al Qabu, Snobar, Tal Salhab, Rasafa, Arzet, and Ain al Arous between 7 and at least 12 March 2025 (see case summaries), individual members of interim government forces and private individuals as above engaged in pillage in violation of international humanitarian law. Such acts may also constitute war crimes. They also amount to unlawful interference with privacy, family, and home under international human rights law.

88. Based on the findings above, the Commission also found that that members of certain factions of the security forces of the interim government, including, but not limited to the 62nd Division (formerly SNA Sultan Suleiman Shah Brigade, also known as Amshat), 76th Division (formerly SNA Al-Hamza division also known as Hamzat faction), Ahrar al Sham, and the 400th Division, that consists of former HTS brigades, engaged in extrajudicial killings and torture and ill-treatment of primarily the civilian population of Alawi majority villages and neighbourhoods in a manner that was both widespread and systematic. The Commission documented severe violence directed at such civilian populations in 19 different locations across four governorates and has credible information concerning similar violence in 27 other locations.[56] The consistent patterns of violence against the civilian population, including targeting based on religious affiliation, age and gender, removal of individuals from homes and collectively executing groups of people, coupled with the frequent referral of decisions on whether individuals were to be killed or spared to their unit or group leaders, indicates that such acts were not random or isolated.[57]

89. It is clear to the Commission that many interim government forces elements neither engaged in nor condoned the actions of those groups set out in the preceding

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

[55] 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.

[56] See Annex II, including Table 1.

[57] 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).

paragraph. To the contrary, it has documented their active efforts to evacuate, or protect certain populations and individuals. However, it is a reasonable conclusion that at least some elements of certain government-affiliated armed factions cited above, and likely some civilians, were aware of the widespread and systematic nature of the violence and themselves engaged in extreme violence with that knowledge.[58] The Commission has found no evidence of a governmental policy or plan to carry out such attacks.[59] At the same time, the systematic nature of the acts in certain locations may be indicative of an organizational policy within certain factions or groups or among private individuals operating in the area to attack civilians. Should such elements be established through further investigation, the acts described above 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. Investigations continue into these aspects.

90. Faced with a serious and volatile situation, the interim Government took steps to prevent and end the violations; it launched an independent investigation and arrested a number of alleged perpetrators. 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-treatment.[60] Nevertheless, the fact that many of the alleged perpetrators comprised individuals and forces acting in their official capacity attaches the international responsibility of the State.[61]

91. Regarding PFGFs, notwithstanding the applicability of the law of non-international armed conflict, numerous acts described in this report are likely to amount to crimes under the domestic legislation of the Syrian Arab Republic, in particular in relation to acts that amount to violations or abuses of international human rights law.[62] In addition, multiple alleged violations, including of murders, remain under investigation. Further, with respect to the specific incidents into which investigations were concluded by the Commission, as detailed in the case summaries in Annex II subsections A-B, there are reasonable grounds to believe that PFGF fighters, in killing women and children on the Jableh-Tartus highway, violated the international humanitarian law prohibition against murder, which may amount to a war crime. In detaining and beating civilians in Deir Elbishel village, PFGFs arbitrarily deprived individuals of liberty and subjected civilians to ill-treatment. During active fighting on 6 and 7 March, through their attacks on Jablah and Al Nour hospitals, and placement of ammunition inside medical facilities,

[58] Ibid., para. 1110.

[59] See for instance in this connection, paragraph 64 of the report, regarding MOI orders to security forces to protect civilians, as well as actions of some interim government forces to evacuate Alawi civilians and confront other armed groups and individuals engaging in violations against civilians. Such information does not discount the possibility that individual high-ranked members of the interim government's security forces may have either actively participated in or have failed to take action to prevent violations against the civilian population when they were made aware of such acts, in spite of orders to the contrary.

[60] 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 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.

[61] 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 Law Study, rule 149.

[62] See Section III , Section V subsections A, C and D, as well as Annex II subsections I.A-B. See also Annex III on Applicable Law.

PFGFs also violated the principle of distinction and failed to take all feasible precautions to protect civilians and civilian objects as required by international humanitarian law.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

92. The establishment of a National Inquiry into the March events and a High-Level Committee to Maintain Civil Peace, as well as the National Transitional Justice Authority[63] and the National Authority for Missing Persons[64] are important first steps to address the root causes of the recent violence, and an acknowledgement that justice and accountability are necessary.

93. The National Inquiry submitted its full report to the President on 13 July and held a press conference summarizing its findings on 22 July, indicating that it had referred two lists with the names of 298 alleged perpetrators of violations among individuals and groups within military factions, as well as 265 alleged perpetrators of violations linked to armed groups associated with the former government to the Attorney General for accountability.[65]

94. The violations that occurred in the lead up to and during the events of March 2025 did not occur in a vacuum, but against a background of rampant human rights violations and abuses, violations of international humanitarian law, war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by parties on all sides of the Syrian conflict since 2011 as documented by the Commission. These in turn followed upon decades of violations committed under successive governments since the Assad family took over in 1971.

95. Guarantees of non-repetition of the violations should be at the heart of Syria's transition, not only as a legal obligation, but as a necessary foundation for peace, reconciliation, and a future built on rights, equality and dignity for all. The events described underscore the need for a comprehensive approach to justice and accountability to break the cycle of violence in the country.

96. Syria's emerging judicial system and transitional justice bodies will therefore need to examine not only the March events described herein, but also the full spectrum of past violations, to avoid excluding any group of victims and survivors.

97. This is a massive task for any judiciary. The flawed system inherited from successive Assad-led governments will require significant reforms before it can offer judicial institutions and law enforcement services that uphold the rule of law and protect all Syrians equally. In these reform efforts, Syria's civil society organizations have much to contribute and should be involved and consulted. Guidance from the UN can also be relied on.[66]

98. During the Commission's visit to the coastal areas in June, officials indicated that 42 individuals reporting to the Ministry of Defence had so far been arrested for alleged abuses committed in March, some of whom were identified in self-incriminating material online. These individuals had reportedly been referred to the judiciary. Efforts are underway to identify and arrest additional suspects, including those who appeared in videos posted online. Government officials also informed the Commission of a recently announced Complaints Office under the Ministry of Interior, aimed at ensuring transparency and responsiveness to citizens' concerns in cases of misconduct by security and police personnel.[67]

99. The Commission's aim is that the findings in this report can aid such efforts going forward.

[63] https://sana.sy/en/?p=355958

[64] https://sana.sy/en/?p=355953

[65] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HK5aPKBazGM and https://sana.sy/en/?p=365511

[66] See, for instance, OHCHR's series on transitional justice tools for post-conflict States, available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications?field_subject_target_id[739]=739&created[min]=&created[max]=&sort_bef_combine=field_published_date_value_DESC

[67] https://www.facebook.com/syrianmoi/posts/1041162668106331?ref=embed_post

100. The fragile Syrian transition is happening at a time when humanitarian and protection needs are at their highest since 2011. Despite the recent encouraging steps towards lifting of sanctions and opening of the country to new investments, daily life for Syrians is marked by poverty and insufficient access to the most basic services. Nearly 16.5 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance, including nearly three million people facing severe food insecurity.[68] The lifting of State subsidies and the large-scale dismissal of civil servants - carried out as government coffers were found empty, albeit without sufficient transparency - disproportionately affected certain areas, including the coastal region, which was historically reliant on public sector jobs.[69] Widespread economic despair is known to fuel violence.

101. Tens of thousands of Alawis have already been displaced from their hometowns and villages. Urgent action is needed to end the cycle of revenge and retaliatory violence and prevent entire areas from becoming emptied - or seeing demographic changes, with long-term implications for social cohesion and prospects for return.

102. Disturbingly, at the time of writing, the Commission keeps on receiving continuous reports of ongoing killings, abductions and arbitrary arrests of members of the Alawi community, as well as the confiscation of the property of those who fled the March violence.

Recommendations

103. Against this background, the Commission offers five sets of urgent recommendations to the interim government and one to the international community.

104. **First, regarding information and communication, the affected communities need to know on a regular basis what steps are being taken to increase their protection and to bring to account those responsible for their suffering. The establishment of a complaints office is an important step in this direction. Dedicated communications offices linked to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior and Justice may help fill the information gap that exists at the present.** Traumatised community members appear starved of information about concrete daily steps that are being taken to stop the continuous killings and abductions. Such offices could provide regular updates with data on the general security forces' growth and deployment to new places, the numbers of arrests or prosecutions of alleged perpetrators and other similar information. The lack of such updates risks leaving people wondering whether action is in fact being taken or whether, to the contrary, these critical issues have not been sufficiently prioritized.

105. **Second, urgent concrete measures are needed to restore protection and prevent further violations, abuses and crimes against civilians such as those described in this report. Such measures could include**:

- Continuing to **identify** individuals suspected of involvement in the crimes described in this report, coupled with immediate suspension from their duties while investigations continue.
- Expanding **screening** processes to ensure that known or suspected perpetrators of grave violations in the past are not recruited into the ranks of the interim government security forces, and ensure full compliance with this exclusion.

[68] https://www.unocha.org/news/security-council-ocha-calls-urgent-funding-syria-crisis-stressing-civilians-cannot-endure

[69] United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council, 21 May 2025.

- Expanding **training** of both newly recruited and existing forces on international human rights and humanitarian law standards, whether reporting to the ministries of defence or interior.[70]
- Expanding efforts to ensure the prompt **return of property** which was stolen or unlawfully occupied during or in the aftermath of these attacks.
- Ensuring the **compliance** of interim government security forces with the Ministry of Defence's code of conduct of 30 May 2025 which sets out the standards required of professional armed forces, including respect for human rights standards, and holding those who do not comply with the code of conduct accountable in accordance with Syrian law.

106. **Third, additional measures to improve relationships and build confidence between security forces and local communities should be considered. Such action could include:**

- Striving for a more **diverse security force composition**; by recruiting from all communities and considering a hybrid composition[71] (of both locals and non-locals) of forces at all checkpoints and visible localities to assuage fears. There are examples of this already happening in parts of Syria, and this model could be replicated if found to be successful.
- Developing more effective and reliable means of **communication** between leaders of impacted communities and responsible commanders to ensure rapid response in case of renewed threats, violence, or harassment of civilians.
- Reviewing and launching publicly a new **strategy for the protection** of the civilian population and the restoration of confidence, taking into account the perspectives of all communities. In addition to the above-mentioned new Complaints Office under the Ministry of Interior, information on which should be disseminated widely, consideration can be given to establishing local committees to address issues between communities and security officials and provide input to protection strategies, mindful that all communities carry trauma and grievances emanating from previous cycles of violence.
- Considering establishing independent **oversight bodies** to guarantee a professional and accountable security sector,[72] which could conduct unscheduled frequent spot inspections of checkpoints and villages to increase discipline and access to authorities for impacted communities.
- Ensuring the enforcement of regulations concerning the clear **identification** of security forces, including the prohibition of masking and standardization of uniforms and insignia.[73]

107. **Fourth, to ensure non-repetition, in addition to the work of the National Inquiry, it is essential to conduct effective and independent criminal investigations into the violations and crimes described in this report, and other instances of alleged violations, as President al-Sharaa already committed to,[74] and to report publicly on**

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[70] A variety of entities can offer support in this regard, including UN entities like OHCHR and UNODC, or entities specialized in IHL like ICRC or Geneva Call, see e.g. https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications?field_subject_target_id%5B736%5D=736; and https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/justice-and-prison-reform/cpcj-tools.html

[71] https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/28/77, para. 29

[72] See e.g. https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/28/77, para. 30

[73] See e.g.: In response to citizens' complaints. General Security Circulates Prohibition of Security Personnel Wearing "Mask" in Damascus | Sham News Network

[74] "We affirm that we will hold accountable, with firmness and without leniency, all those involved in the bloodshed of civilians or who harmed our people, those who exceeded the state's authority or exploited power for their own interests. No one will be above the law, and all those whose hands are stained with Syrian blood will face justice sooner rather than later," President al-Sharaa stressed", Speech by President of the Syrian Arab Republic on the recent developments in the Syrian coast, SANA, 10 March 2025, available at https://sana.sy/en/?p=349169. See

findings. Pending the much-needed reforms of the former government's flawed judicial system, intermediate steps could include:

- **Following up** on the National Inquiry's findings and recommendations, including regarding accountability for the alleged perpetrators it identified, whose names were referred to the Attorney General.[75]
- Continuing efforts to establish a minimum level of capacity in the judicial system to enable **investigation, prosecution and first-instance adjudication** of criminal cases, and at a minimum the ability to review the legality of detention of suspects, while efforts are deployed to rapidly rebuild the criminal judicial system in ways enabling the State to conduct fair trials[76] and to hold alleged perpetrators of the most serious violations and crimes to account, including those who are members of the interim government's forces.[77] In this regard, consider adopting a formal **moratorium** on the death penalty with a view towards abolition.
- Ensuring the identification, preservation, and forensic examination of **mass grave sites** in accordance with international standards.[78]
- Accelerating the provision of **official documentation attesting to the death of victims,** including medical and police records, in order to enable registration in the civil registry to access inheritance rights and property claims, among other things.

108. **Fifth, to rebuild trust between and within communities and in recognition of the harm done, steps taken by the interim authorities could include the following**:

- Locating and deploying interlocutors respected across communities to arrange **dialogues** between communities, building upon civil society actors' community-led initiatives, to exchange on challenges, views, and experiences and to promote national reconciliation and dialogue.

also, Presidential decision to form an independent national committee to investigate the events of the Syrian Coast", SANA, 9 March 2025, available at https://sana.sy/en/?p=349109. See also https://t.me/SyrianArabNewsAgency/124380.

75 Besides recommending criminal prosecutions of those responsible and the urgent implementation of transitional justice measures to address past abuses and prevent future retaliation, the National Inquiry also recommended dialogue and peacebuilding initiatives; legislative, executive, and educational measures to prevent hate speech and sectarian incitement, including online; as well as legal reforms to harmonize Syria's domestic laws with Syria's ratified international agreements. It also urged the interim authorities to sign the UN Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. It further recommended significant security sector reforms including ensuring that armed factions integrated under the Ministry of Defence comply with a unified code of conduct issued in May 2025, with clear rules and oversight, and that security, police, and military institutions should adopt modern equipment and uphold human rights standards. The National Inquiry also recommended the review of dismissals of civil servants to ensure legality and fairness, as well as the establishment of a legal reparations programme for victims and the creation of an independent national human rights commission.

76 See e.g. https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications/training-and-education-publications/human-rights-administration-justice-manual-human human_rights_training_manual_administration_justice_en.pdf, chapter 7.

77 In relation to criminal justice, in breaking with the previous government, the Commission suggests for the interim government to seek to ensure e.g. that all judgements and decisions of judicial authorities are made public and widely available and that there is sufficient space for survivors and families to attend trials and obtain information on the progress of trials and investigations, Facilitate access to national and international trial observers to observe criminal trials. In planning for criminal justice reforms - including through international financial support – it further suggests to factor in the need for witness protection services, adequate detention facilities for pretrial and convicted individuals, measures for reparations and compensation, as well as psychosocial support and family and victim services.

78 Including exhumation of bodies by independent forensic experts, the preservation of evidence for potential judicial proceedings, the establishment of the cause of death and a victims' registry, and ensuring that families are provided with timely and transparent information, including official death certificates and forensic reports, to enable mourning, legal recognition, and reparations. See e.g. https://docs.un.org/en/A/75/384 pages 15-24 https://docs.un.org/en/A/75/384 and https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/external/doc/en/assets/files/other/icrc-002-858.pdf.

- Continuing to engage **religious and community leaders** in condemning hate speech and incitement to violence, and in encouraging peaceful coexistence and reconciliation in public messaging and in connection with religious teachings.[79]
- Increasing efforts to **prevent dissemination of incitement** to hatred, discrimination, and violence**,** offline and online on social media.[80]
- Continuing efforts to provide (directly or through facilitating access for independent aid providers/NGOs) urgent **relief measures** to victims and their families such as one-time cash assistance for survivors; medical and psychological support; support to rehabilitation of destroyed property or temporary shelters.
- Continuing to review the mass layoffs of public sector civil servants and consider the **reintegration of qualified individuals**.
- Expanding efforts to ensure **inclusivity** of all communities in the new Syrian government and State institutions, including through broad and inclusive consultations bringing together a wide range of Syrians to develop a common national vision.

109. **Sixth, the Commission welcomes the newly established national bodies on Transitional Justice[81] and the Missing[82] and looks forward to cooperating with them, building on the vast body of material that this Commission has collected since 2011. It recommends that these new bodies consider:**

- Ensuring early and sustained **consultations** with survivors, families, Syrian civil society and non-governmental organisations in elaborating their strategies.
- Ensuring that **all victims and survivors have equal access** to justice and redress.[83]
- Providing the space for reconciliation alongside retributive justice, by considering **both criminal and non-criminal justice strategies** for past and ongoing crimes and violations.

110. **Seventh, to facilitate a peaceful transition in Syria, the Commission reiterates the following recommendations to UN Member States to consider:**

- **Providing support** to the interim government in addressing the above recommendations.
- Exercising their influence over warring parties responsible for crimes and violations to bring an end to such violations and abuses, **conditioning any financial or logistical support on compliance** with international human rights and humanitarian law standards.
- Continuing engaging with the interim government on steps needed to **lift the remaining sectoral sanctions** that were imposed on Syria in response to mass atrocity crimes by the former government.
- Expanding **funding to the humanitarian response**, both in Syria and in neighbouring countries hosting newly arrived refugees, and to **reconstruction**;

[79] In this regard, the "Faith for Rights" framework can be helpful, see https://www.ohchr.org/en/faith-for-rights and https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Press/21451/18CommitmentsonFaithforRights.pdf

[80] Bearing in mind that any restriction of expression, including in relation to counter-terrorism laws, must follow strictly the criteria set out in articles 19 (3) and 20 (2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Also, in this regard, the government may consider developing and implementing measures within the framework of the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence, see https://www.ohchr.org/en/freedom-of-expression.

[81] See footnote 63.

[82] See footnote 64.

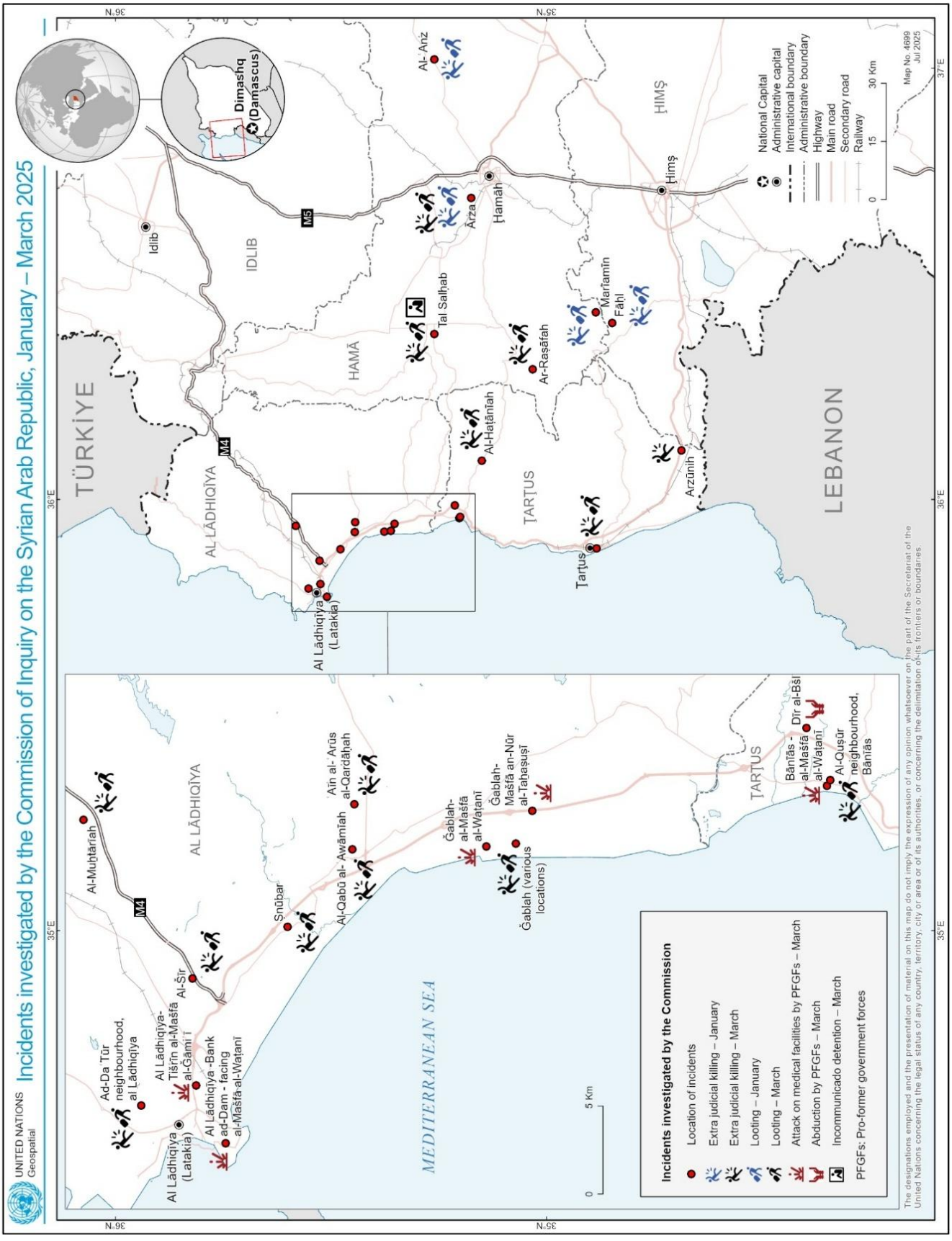
[83] See e.g. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-and-guidelines-right-remedy-and-reparation.

- Continuing to **support initiatives that promote reconciliation, peace and countering incitement to violence**; including international efforts to prevent incitement online.
- Continuing to **facilitate criminal proceedings**, including in national jurisdictions based on universal jurisdiction, for international crimes committed in Syria, in fair trials where the death penalty does not apply.

111. Finally, the Commission reiterates its long-standing recommendation for the Syrian Arab Republic to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court,[84] as well as the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

[84] See A/HRC/S-17/2/Add. 1 para 112.

Annex I – Map of emblematic incidents



Annex II – Case summaries

Section I below briefly summarizes the Commission's factual findings with respect to specific incidents investigated in the context of the large-scale violence in coastal areas and central western Syria in March 2025 which impacted civilians in 16 different locations.

Section II below similarly summarizes the Commission's findings with respect to specific incidents impacting civilians during combing operations in four locations in Homs and Hama governorates in January-March 2025.

These locations are indicated on the map in Annex I. Table 1 below provides an overview of alleged violations affecting civilians, including civilian properties and infrastructure, that were documented and corroborated by the Commission between 1 January to 1 June 2025 in the same locations (C=Corroborated by 1 June 2025).

I. Specific incidents investigated in the context of the large-scale violence in coastal areas and Central Western Syria in March 2025 which impacted civilians

Subsections A-P below provide further detail into alleged violations occurring in 16 locations in March. The first two subsections (A-B) describe incidents involving alleged violations and violence by PFGFs that impacted civilians in two locations. The following subsections (C-P) describe alleged violations and violence impacting civilians in several majority Alawi districts, towns and villages in 14 other locations. The last subsection (Q) summarizes the preliminary results of the Commission's investigations into multiple cases of alleged abductions of women, which are still ongoing.

A. Attacks on civilians on the highway between Jablah and Tartus

Multiple civilians were injured by PFGFs in the context of the clashes and violence that occurred on 6-7 March along the highway between Jablah and Tartus. One witness saw how PFGF fighters shot and killed at least four women and children who were inside a civilian vehicle parked along the highway. Separately, the Commission obtained video footage that shows a burnt vehicle alongside the highway, carrying Aleppo license plates, with charred bodies inside.

Another witness, a medical professional, recalled how, in the evening of 6 March, several injured civilian victims were admitted to a hospital in Jablah. According to the witness, a father and his son were injured at the entrance of Jablah city, while a woman was injured in her vehicle near Al Remeilah area, close to the Naval Academy (see also below), at a checkpoint operated by PFGFs. The woman died later. Due to the on-going hostilities, another injured man could reportedly not be transported to the hospital and also succumbed to his injuries.

The clashes also impacted media staff who had travelled to the M1 highway to document and report on the evolving security situation. For instance, on 6 March, a media crew travelled to the Beit Ana area, near Jablah city, when fighting erupted between General Security and PFGFs. At around 5.30 p.m. as fighting intensified, the crew headed towards the Hmeimim bridge, when a PFGF fighter opened fire at the vehicle the crew was in. This led to an injury to the leg of one of the media staff and caused damage to the vehicle. PFGFs continued shooting at the vehicle, which carried an Idlib governorate license plate, after the victim was wounded. The media staff all wore helmets and bullet-proof vests with "PRESS" written on them.

The day after, on 7 March, another journalist travelled to the area to report on the clashes near the highway, around Deir Elbishel village, some six kilometers from Jablah city. The victim recalled how, once near the Deir Elbishel bridge, he approached several parked vehicles nearby. Around 30 armed individuals, belonging to the PFGFs, suddenly opened fire at his vehicle, causing significant damage to the vehicle and forcing the victim to exit the car and seek refuge behind a small hill. When the shooting stopped, the armed men asked the victim who he was, to which he replied he was unarmed, a civilian and a journalist.

PFGFs then abducted the witness and took him to a civilian house in Deir Elbishel village, where he was held with another civilian man from Homs. The witness observed approximately 30 additional armed men in or around the house, with most wearing civilian t-shirts bearing the logo of the "Coast Shield" and others dressed in military uniforms associated with the former Syrian Army. Both victims were beaten, threatened and insulted, including with sectarian slurs. One of the armed men was carrying a sword and threatened to behead one of the victims saying: "You are coming to slaughter the Alawis, you dogs", that: "Assad will return to power, and will shut their mouths, rape their women and slaughter them". The two abductees were able to escape after some hours, after reinforcement forces consisting of the MOD arrived at the area.

B. Attacks on medical facilities

On 6 March, as hostilities alongside the M1 spilled over to adjacent coastal towns, witnesses reported armed individuals shooting at or near several hospitals in Jablah, Baniyas, and the Tashreen University hospital and a blood bank in Latakia, disrupting medical services for two weeks. According to the caretaker authorities, at least six hospitals in Latakia and Tartus governorates were affected in the context of the broader PFGFs attack in the area.

The Commission's investigations into these incidents showed that the Tishrine University Hospital and the adjacent blood bank, both in Latakia city, themselves did not sustain significant structural damage. The Commission's investigations into the attack on the Baniyas National Hospital on 6 March in Baniyas city are ongoing.

The Commission's investigations into the incidents related to two hospitals in Jablah showed that, starting at around 7 p.m. on 6 March, the Jablah National Hospital was encircled by PFGFs for at least one day after members of factions from the armed forces closed the hospital's main entrance. Non-critical patients were discharged, while medical staff, civilian patients requiring urgent care, and several members of the armed forces remained inside. At least two General Security members who sought treatment at the hospital belonged to Hamza division (76th Division). PFGFs, positioned outside of the facility, threw hand grenades and shot at the hospital using rocket-propelled grenades, causing structural damage but no civilian casualties. One General Security member was killed by sniper fire after he was shot by a PFGF fighter, positioned on a building across the hospital within the same hospital compound. Negotiations to stop the fighting failed after the interim authorities' security forces refused to surrender their weapons to the opposing armed group whose members spoke with a coastal dialect. Medical staff present were not evacuated but chose to leave despite the absence of security guarantees from either side.

On 7 March, after MOD reinforcements arrived, they evacuated injured General Security members to a makeshift hospital in a local mosque. One witness described that the doctors treated many that evening in this facility, including a 75-year-old man, a 6-year-old girl with a gunshot wound to the pelvis, and multiple injured General Security force members. Victims came from both Sunni and Alawi communities. Evacuation routes were also limited, with some injured individuals transported by sea to Baniyas.

At the same time, around 7 p.m., PFGFs stormed the Al Nour private hospital, also in Jablah, and prohibited medical staff inside from leaving the facility, until late afternoon on Friday, 7 March, when the reinforcement forces came to the site. PFGFs forced medical staff to treat their injured fighters, confiscated mobile phones, and prohibited them from contacting their families. They stored ammunition inside the facility. One ambulance was reportedly stolen from Al Nour hospital and later found damaged near the Al Sina cemetery in Jablah.

In the early morning hours of 7 March, a group of nurses and doctors attempted to escape from the Jablah National Hospital compound and were then targeted by sniper fire by the PFGFs. Additionally, that same night, several doctors travelling in an ambulance came under gunfire, damaging the vehicle.

Table 1: Alleged violations investigated in selected locations (C=Corroborated by 1 June 2025)

Location[85]	*Killings of men*	*Killings of women /children*	*Torture or ill-treatment*	*Looting*	*Property destruction or occupation*	*Attacks medical facilities*
23 January-7 March 2025						
Fahel, Homs	C		C	C		
Mreimin	C		C	C	C	
Anz, Hama	C		C	C	C	
Arzet, Hama	C		C	C	C	
6-10 March 2025						
Latakia governorate						
Jablah[86]	C	C	C	C	C	C
Snobar	C		C	C	C	
Shir	C	C	C	C	C	
Al-Qabu	C		C	C		
Mokhtariyeh	C	C	C	C	C	
Kharibeh	C		C			
Latakia city						C
Al Daatour	C		C	C	C	
Al Thawra			C	C	C	
Ain al-Arous	C	C	C	C	C	
Tartus governorate						
Baniyas city						C
Al Qusoor	C	C	C	C	C	
Tartus city	C		C	C		
Arzona	C				C	
Hattaniya	C	C		C	C	
Hama governorate						
Tal Salhab	C		C	C		
Rasafa	C	C	C	C	C	
Arzet	C		C	C	C	
Total	**19**	**7**	**18**	**18**	**15**	**5**[87]

[85] In addition to the 19 locations listed here, the Commission received reports of similar violations in at least 27 additional locations which remain under investigation. These include: *Latakia governorate: Latakia city, Al-Qardaha, villages of Basa, Bahloliyeh, Barabsho, Rweimiyeh, Astamo, Jablah, Msheirfeh, Al-Haffa, Bustan Elbasha, Bisaysin, Tarjano, Qarfis, Shalfatiyeh, Hanadi and Shamiyet Elmahalba. *Tartus governorate: Tartus city, Baniyas city, villages of Anaza, Bluzeh - Sheikh Bader, Qallue, Yahmur, Harisun and Hamam Wasil. *Hama governorate: villages of Tweim and Alamein.

[86] Includes killings of men, women and children and torture and ill-treatment by PFGFs.

[87] Attacks on medical facilities by PFGFs on 6 March 2025.

C. Attacks in Jablah City and surrounding villages, Latakia governorate

Later that same day, at around 6 p.m. on 7 March, convoys of unidentified armed men began arriving in Jablah from Aleppo and Idlib governorates. In Jablah City, one witness described seeing military vehicles with mounted machine guns bearing the Arabic inscription "There is no God, but God". Masked armed men on motorcycles travelled alongside, some allegedly from Jablah, and were shooting at buildings and people. Interviewees reported hearing the armed individuals "calling on jihad" as they chanted: "we are coming for you, pigs." In the Amara neighbourhood, an Alawi-populated district, witnesses saw armed men going door-to-door, threatening: "You Alawis come all here; you will all be slaughtered."

Beginning at approximately 7 p.m., armed men began door-to-door house raids, carried out widespread looting of homes and shops, and set vehicles and homes on fire. Witnesses stated that the armed men – who concealed their identities by wearing masks and clothing that bore no insignia – raided homes one after another in quick succession. Victims told the Commission that the armed men looted "everything they could," including money, gold, electronic devices, and other valuables, and stole vehicles.

Armed men sometimes transported looted household items in pick-up trucks, with two interviewees witnessing how looted items were loaded onto vehicles in Jablah on the bridge near the highway.

Victims and their family members explained how, during the house raids, they were threatened, insulted, called "pigs," and questioned about whether they were Alawi or Sunni, or whether they had held positions within the former SAA. Victims were also asked whether they prayed, and some Alawi women were asked why they were wearing hijab. One victim described how, after her home was looted, one alleged "Amshat" member told her: "*Alawis, you are kuffar, and you attacked us in 2011 and threw barrel bombs on us*."

Killings

In most of the cases investigated by the Commission, looting by armed men was carried out alongside killings, often of multiple male relatives within the same families. Interviewees also told the Commission that some were asked by armed men if they knew where the Alawi families resided, because "they wanted to kill them." Others saw civilians from Jablah city pointing at houses where Alawi families resided, followed by unidentified armed men then shooting at those houses.

In cases where killings were documented by the Commission, men were first identified as belonging to the Alawi sect and then separated from the women and children, before being led outside, and shot and killed. Survivors explained that the killings occurred after victims were referred to as "pigs", or told: "you, Alawi, should all be slaughtered." One witness heard armed men who looted the house of her Alawi neighbour, saying, in broken Arabic, "you must die."

Survivors described hearing bursts of gunfire moments after the men were taken away, with some women family members later discovering the bodies of their loved ones strewn nearby. In one case investigated by the Commission, a woman described how, on 7 March, at around 7 p.m., armed men kicked in the door of her home, and started shooting inside, causing damage to the walls. The armed individuals then questioned whether the family was Alawi, asked for "money and gold," and ordered an older man and one of his sons to go outside. The armed men then shot her son, who had remained inside. When the witness went outside, she found the bodies of her husband and other son, both shot in the head in what she referred to as a "sea of blood".

Collection of the bodies, disposals, and burials

Interviewees described seeing bodies on the streets of Jablah from the morning of 8 March through at least 10 March, including 18 bodies of men observed on al-Farwa Street alone which is located in front of the Naval Academy (above), including a 15-year-old boy. Most of the victims appeared to have been in their 50s, were dressed in civilian clothes, and many had been shot in the head. The Commission received reports that clashes had taken place on

al-Farwa Street on 6 March. A toddler was reportedly injured by a stray bullet while in her home.

One interviewee told the Commission that they saw five male bodies, including one aged 23 years whom they knew and who had been shot in the head, near the Al Amara roundabout in Al Amara neighbourhood, an Alawi populated neighbourhood of Jablah city. Witnesses also described seeing shops and cars set on fire, with people cleaning blood off the ground. Reportedly, blood stains remained visible on the streets until at least 10 March.

Ongoing clashes, road closures, or fear of reprisals prevented the immediate collection or burial of the dead. Some families were thus forced to keep the bodies of victims inside their homes for up to five days, further compounding the harm and trauma of their experiences. At Al-Faroua Street, one witness explained that families were not allowed to collect the bodies of their loved ones by armed men who reportedly told them that they: "wanted the bodies to rot." Reportedly, a man was killed while trying to cover the dead bodies near Farwa street in Jablah.

Meanwhile, and following the attack by PFGFs on the two main hospitals in Jablah city (see section B above), medical operations were suspended for several days. At least one ambulance was stolen and damaged, delaying the collection and identification of the dead. When access was partially restored, hospitals were quickly overwhelmed, and bodies began piling up in the morgue. Interviewees recalled that, in Al Nour private hospital, four bodies, including one woman, were placed on the floor or in one mortuary storage unit designed to hold only two. In the Jablah National Hospital, due to a power outage, mortuary refrigerators were not functioning until 9 March, resulting in bodies being stored without proper preservation.

On 11 March, after a small fire broke out in Al Nour hospital, some families rushed to collect the bodies from the morgue. All bodies were reportedly taken for burial that day. Reportedly, 15 days after the events, the bodies of eight individuals including both civilians and fighters were buried in a mass grave. The dead could not be identified prior to the burial due to the lack of identification documentation and due to the fact that no family members had claimed the bodies.

Alleged perpetrators

Witnesses described the alleged perpetrators as armed men dressed in black and masked, who spoke in Arabic dialects from Idlib, Homs, or Deir ez-Zor. Others were described as Syrians wearing green and beige military attire, and some had long beards. Some also appeared to be foreign fighters who had "Asian features" and spoke "broken Arabic." One witness was informed that "Amshat" were heading to Jablah "to kill them."

D. Snobar town, Latakia governorate

Snobar is a small town, hosting a former SAA military camp, located south of Latakia, also along the M1 highway. Since the fall of the Assad government, interim government security forces have been training at the camp. The residents heard constant sounds of shooting from the camp in the lead up to the 7 March attacks, including at night. Shooting from houses in the town was also reported during the evening of 6 March. A marked civil defence ambulance reportedly came under fire twice from houses in Snobar, and the village on the opposite side of the M1 highway.

An estimated 216 people were killed in Snobar on 7 and 8 March, of which the Commission verified 29. In addition, a Commission team visited a mass burial site in the town, where 108 people were reportedly buried. Houses were looted and destroyed. General Security was present in the town during the events.

The violence started when around 300 armed men entered Snobar on the morning of 7 March, driving vehicles with black flags with the *Shahada*, the Syrian flag, and flags of the Hamza and Amshat SNA brigades.

Witnesses described many groups of armed men wearing military uniforms and civilian clothes, including in one case with Hayat Tahrir al Sham and Ahrar al Sham badges, and red and green headbands. They included foreign fighters.

Armed men beat men and women with rifles and called family members “pigs.” About 15 of them participated in the killing of 13 residents in one location. Another group of male villagers, including a 17-year-old and 15-year-old boys were executed in another place. “Each one had a full magazine of bullets in their back, and they were dead.”

Witnesses described being called Alawi pigs and dogs by armed men, as well as threatened with retaliation on the basis of their perceived support for the former government. One Alawi woman described how masked armed men in military uniforms with black tags that said “*la ilaha illa allah*” looted houses, and said: “*we are here to genocide you, the young and the old*" and: “*we are from Idlib, we are here to kill you, you killed us during Hafiz and Bashar’s rule.*" Her husband was among a group of men subsequently executed.

In another instance armed men asked male villagers whether they “loved (president) al-Sharaa” and told them: *“al-Shaara gave you security and you betrayed him."* before shooting and killing 15 male relatives, including an elderly man and two children. Elsewhere, a gunman shot and killed a man in front of his house and then shot and killed two women inside. In another location, five armed men executed three Alawi civilians in a field. One man who introduced himself as from “al-Sharaa’s army” reportedly told a witness: “you are Alawi, you hit us in 2012 in the beginning of the events, now we hit you. You killed us during the war, now we kill you."

Armed men beat two Alawi men, destroying one’s face with a stone and shooting another in the leg. Other men and women were seriously injured by gunshots and beatings with rifles, resulting in in life-changing injuries for three women. In one instance, a man was beaten with a rifle but ultimately his life was spared after his family demonstrated their religious commitment.

In a video verified and geolocated to Snobar on 7 March which circulated on social media, an armed man filmed himself walking through Snobar with dead bodies littered behind him singing: *“*We’ve come to you. We’ve come to you with the taste of death.*”* The same man also appears in a video in which armed men boast about killing Alawis and step on a religious picture.

Attackers set multiple houses on fire. Witnesses also reported dead bodies being set on fire. Throughout the day, extensive looting and property destruction continued, including of pictures of Alawi religious figures.

Witnesses also reported incidents in which women and girls were subjected to and threatened with sexual and gender-based violence.

Collection of the bodies, disposals, and burials

Armed men remained in the town the following day. Witnesses described the dead bodies of their relatives being left in the street or inside houses for days. According to one witness, armed men in the town beat those that tried to collect their family members’ bodies unless they paid money. It was the women who dug the graves of their sons because there were not enough men left after the killings. When one witness asked to bury the bodies of their relatives in accordance with Islamic practice, one armed man responded: “pigs do not bury their people."

Alleged perpetrators

Witness accounts and footage indicate the presence and involvement of the former SNA Sultan Suleiman Shah Brigade, former SNA Al Hamza division and Ahrar al Sham, in the killing or injury of civilians or looting and destruction of private property on 7 and 8 March in Snobar.

Witness accounts and footage also indicate the presence of former HTS brigades, including elite forces (Red Bands) and foreign fighters, including some based in the nearby military barracks, in the killing or injury of civilians or looting and destruction of private property on 7 and 8 March in Snobar.

Witnesses described General Security members being present in the town during the day on 7 and 8 March, searching houses, interviewing a witness after their house had been raided

and, on one occasion, offering to protect a female witness' house. Witnesses reported that as of late May, looting of the town by armed men continued. General Security had not managed to prevent it.

E. Shir village, Latakia governorate

Shir village is located east of Latakia city (see map Annex I). On 7 March, between 6 a.m. and 7 a.m. convoys began arriving in the village. According to one witness, the armed men parked their vehicles near the main highway. Approximately 100 men entered the village dressed in military attire and heavily armed with machine guns, AK-47 assault rifles, mortars and hammers. As they advanced, the armed individuals were reportedly chanting "*Alawi pigs*" and *"nusayris."*

Looting

Between 7 and 7.30 a.m., groups of armed men began house-to-house raids. Different groups looted civilian homes until at least 9.30 a.m., each arriving after the other and entering the homes to steal jewellery, electronics, and other valuables, along with portable furniture items and vehicles. During the looting, victims described how armed factions insulted them with sectarian slurs and beat some residents. Shops were also looted and houses set on fire. The looting reportedly continued over the following days, after many of the locals had fled and their homes were emptied.

One victim described how armed men came to her home at around 7.30 a.m. and stole money, a television, and a car battery. The armed men, whom she described as "foreigners" wearing masks, insulted and hit the victim on the head with a gun, causing her to briefly lose consciousness. They asked where her sons were, and whether they had served with the former SAA. When the victim explained that one of her sons had been killed, and that the second had no choice but to serve in the army, they responded that "[*they will] make the Alawi suffer.*" Another armed man said that, if his own mother were Alawi, he would *"slaughter her too*.".

Killings

In most cases investigated by the Commission looting was accompanied by killings of male family members, in addition to threats and recurrent insults with sectarian undertones, as noted above.

In one case, a witness explained how, after her house was looted by the first group at around 7.30 a.m., another group, with accents from Al Sleibeh, came and looted their home. The armed men ordered the women to stay upstairs, and the men to go to the ground floor. After a while, the armed men ordered the entire family go to the ground floor. When the family members began complying, armed individuals shot near their legs as they walked downstairs. When the family reached the ground floor, the armed men took three men from the house, and they left together in the family's car. The witness later found the bodies of her loved ones, which were left in another neighbourhood around five minutes from the house. A third group of armed men, who also spoke in the Al Sleibeh accent and wore masks, then came to the house and looted what was left.

Secondary accounts provided to the Commission indicated that additional killings of civilian men took place, along with beatings of victims' family members. Reportedly, after a young student was killed in Shir, his family was unable to immediately bury him and were forced to keep the body inside the house. Several other factions that went to loot the home all shot at his body.

Armed individuals also filmed themselves carrying out severe beatings and killings, in an apparent effort to intimidate communities, particularly those belonging to the Alawi minority. Video material analysed and verified by the Commission showed men in military attire alongside men in civilian clothing shooting at unarmed men in civilian clothing. The shots were to their head and backs, killing them instantly. Video footage obtained by the Commission also showed armed individuals beating, whipping, kicking, and slapping terrified victims, who had been forced to kneel. One video showed a young man crawling with an armed man on his back, with another man nearby, also armed and with a mask.

Another video showed armed individuals walking near the bodies of at least two dead men in Shir.

Collection of bodies and burials

Interviewees estimated that up to 65 people including boys and old men were killed on the morning of 7 March in Shir. The Commission was able to verify 14 of the 65, including boys and old men. Witnesses and secondary accounts indicated that the victims were between 15 and 50 years of age. One interviewee told the Commission that they saw around 20 bodies piled up in trucks on the afternoon of 7 March, as well as armed men with long beards, dressed in black and green military attire, some masked, burning bodies near the river close to Shir.

One witness told the Commission that among those killed was a former head of a juvenile detention facility. Reportedly, unidentified armed men went to his home and called him by name before killing him. The victim's brother and three sons, aged between 17 and 25 years, were also killed. The witness further noted that some of the other victims were related to former Syrian military or security personnel.

An elderly man, aged 70 years, was also killed on 9 March and found dead in front of his home.

Families were forced to keep the bodies of their dead relatives near their homes for up to five days. Some funerals reportedly took place on 9 March, though most families buried their loved ones near their homes. According to reports, on 9 March, another group of armed men came to the village, continued looting homes, and shot at residents, including while some families were burying their loved ones. One boy, aged 14, was shot in the head and killed during a burial in the cemetery.

At least one family was prevented by armed men from mourning or performing religious rites. A witness explained how, when she first saw the bodies of her three relatives on 7 March, armed men speaking with the Al Sleibeh accent ordered her not to cry. When she asked for help to bring the bodies to her home, they told her to take them to the house herself and "bury them quietly." On 9 March, despite their fears, family members buried seven family members in one same grave, in the presence of armed men who prohibited them from performing funeral rites.

Alleged perpetrators

Witnesses described the alleged perpetrators as armed men with no identifying insignia, with several masking their faces to obscure their identities. Some were dressed in military attire of olive or beige colour, while some wore black. Some spoke in Arabic with accents from Al Sleibeh and other Sunni-populated districts in Latakia City, including Al Haffa, Al Iskantouri, and Al Raml al Janoubi districts. Others were described as "foreigners" who spoke Arabic with a strong foreign accent.

F. Al Qabu Al-Awamiyah village, Latakia governorate

Al Qabu Al-Awamiyah is a small village in the Latakia countryside. Forty-four men, women and children were reported to have been killed in the village on 7 March, of which the Commission confirmed six. More than 120 houses were looted and burned over subsequent days.

According to a woman who lived in the village, General Security oversaw three main checkpoints around this village prior to 7 March. Following complaints of arbitrary detention and beating of men at one of the checkpoints since December 2024, General Security members running the checkpoints were reportedly changed. According to an Alawi witness, many men from the village had undergone a settlement process in December 2024.

Sounds of shooting near the village started in the night of 6 March. From around noon onwards on 7 March, heavy shooting began inside the village itself, damaging buildings. According to a witness, armed men called an Alawi family pigs and traitors, with one armed man reportedly saying: "we will end you, you are infidels, your men should be killed by the

sword and your women are for entertainment" and: "we should cleanse the earth from you, you are filth on the ground and we will end this filth."

A group of approximately 200 armed individuals wearing red, yellow and black armbands congregated in the village, including some who appeared to be between 14 and 17 years old.

Shortly before 4 p.m., armed men wearing black armbands inscribed with: "There is no god but God", forced three men to kneel and executed them after confirming that they were Alawis.

Armed men looted homes, taking gold, money, laptops, mobile phones, solar panels, inverters and a generator. A survivor who continued to seek refuge in nearby agricultural land, reported groups of armed men on motorcycles in the village shouting in triumph that they were victorious. By this time, the village was empty of the villagers but looting continued. For unknown reasons, General Security prevented the witnesses from burying their relatives in the cemetery until 12 March, five days later.

A video of an older Alawi woman standing over the dead bodies of men in Al Qabu Al-Awamiyah appearing to remonstrate with armed men after they had allegedly killed her sons circulated widely on social media. Following attention garnered by the video, local authorities visited Al Qabu and denied responsibility for what had happened in the village.

Insecurity continues for those who remain, with reports of Alawi men being beaten and abducted at checkpoints on 28 and 29 April. Investigations are ongoing.

Alleged perpetrators

Investigations are ongoing with respect to those alleged to be responsible for the killing of Alawi civilians in Al Qabu Al-Awamiyah. General Security were present in the village while killings and looting took place.

G. Mokhtariyeh village, Latakia governorate

Mokhtariyeh is a small Alawi village, located some 20 kilometres east of Latakia, adjacent to the M4 highway where clashes also occurred. In that context, during the evening of 6 March, shooting erupted near a checkpoint set up under Mokhtariyeh bridge and continued until the early hours of 7 March.

At approximately 7.30 a.m., a large convoy of armed vehicles arrived near the bridge. A former SAA soldier described seeing 3000-4000 armed men firing weapons towards the village. Vehicles from the same convoy also reportedly entered nearby Kharibeh village (see below).

In the events that ensued, at least 128 were killed in Mokhtariyeh, of which the Commission verified 55. The Commission's team visited a mass grave in the village, where some 200 people were reportedly buried.

At approximately 8 a.m., a mixture of Syrian and foreign fighters entered the village, some chanting: *"*Allahu Akbar" "God is great" and "We are the Hamzat, Amshat and Sultan Murad factions; we approach God during this holy month by killing *nusairiyah."* The men were wearing desert military uniforms, and some were masked. They carried batons, knives, machetes and axes. One group of armed men who appeared to be foreign were shouting "*God bless Abu Amsha*."

A group of armed men took three men and a 17-year-old boy to a field and executed them.

Armed men then went door to door in the village looking for men and boys until approximately 11 a.m. They asked people if they were Sunni or Alawi, and those who answered Alawi were taken away and killed immediately. At least 27 men were executed in an open-sided storage warehouse, while at least 34 others were killed close to the main square of the village. A further 32 men and boys were reportedly killed inside homes, and in the street. Those killed included older men, twin boys aged approximately 13, the mukhtar, and a man with visible disabilities. One woman was also reportedly killed inside her home, alongside her husband. Verified and geolocated videos show relatives grieving over the bodies of approximately 24 dead men, on the road in Mokhtariyeh on 7 March.

One group of armed men beat a witness and his brother, a child, on the genitals with their rifles in the presence of their female relatives.

Burial of bodies

According to a witness, armed forces including General Security only allowed the burial of his relatives after four days.

Looting and destruction of property

Armed men looted cars, motorcycles, washing machines, televisions, gas cylinders, money, gold, and mobile phones. Looting continued during the following month, including reportedly by civilians. All shops except one are reportedly closed. Nearly all homes have been destroyed.

Alleged perpetrators

Witness accounts indicate the presence of the former SNA Sultan Suleiman Shah Brigade, former SNA Al-Hamza division and foreign fighters in Mokhtariyeh on 7 March. Witnesses also indicated the presence of General Security on 7 March and the days that followed.

Kharibeh village, Latakia

A video authenticated by the Commission, which circulated widely on social media, shows armed men dressed in camouflage military uniforms and black uniforms beating civilian men with batons and sticks as they crawled on the ground in nearby Kharibeh village on 7 March. At least two men in the video appear to have been killed. In another video circulating on social media [and verified], men from the village were forced to crawl on the ground and bark like dogs. Armed men then reportedly gathered the men in one place and executed them. Investigations are ongoing.

H. Al Qusoor neighbourhood, Baniyas City, Tartus governorate

Baniyas City has approximately 40,000 inhabitants. The south of the city is predominantly populated by Sunni Muslims, while the northern neighbourhoods are mostly Alawi. The Commission previously documented serious human rights violations by former government forces in Sunni areas in and near Baniyas city.[88]

6 March

On 6 March, PFGFs reportedly carried out an armed attack on General Security, including at Baniyas police station in the Al Qusoor neighbourhood. Witnesses living near the highway described shooting and clashes from around 5 p.m, that lasted all night.

7 March

Early on 7 March, witnesses heard gunshots and shelling in Baniyas city. By mid-morning, a convoy of vehicles reportedly entered the Al Qusoor neighbourhood, with around 200 armed men. At least 253 were reported to have been killed, of which the Commission verified 38.

One Alawi witness's home was entered by masked armed men. One asked: "where are the weapons?" and slapped a man, another beat two women. One man followed a woman into a bedroom and stole her jewellery.

Another Alawi family's home was also raided by armed men, who first shot at the front door. Three armed men, two in camouflage and one in civilian clothes, then entered and kicked an Alawi man in the head, back and chest, leaving him unconscious in the street. They then shot his father in the head and chest, killing him.

[88] A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1 para. 54; A/HRC/21/50 para. 17; A/HRC.24/46, paragraphs 10-14, 102.

In another home, four men and a 16-year-old boy were abducted in the middle of the day by three armed men. The assailants first searched the home, asking if the family were Alawis and if they had weapons. The dead bodies of the four men and the teenager were later identified in a video circulating online.

An Alawi woman saw vehicles with mounted weapons on the street around 1 p.m. Three stopped in front of her building and armed men with long hair and red headbands took her neighbour outside for "settlement." She heard them saying "*Alawis, you pigs*" before they shot him dead.

Armed men, shouting "*pigs, dogs*", were also seen bringing around seven men onto the street before shooting and killing them. Another witness saw armed men beating up two men who had their hands tied behind their backs.

There were dead and burnt bodies in the street. Verified video footage show armed men dressed in black celebrating the burning of dead bodies, stepping on them and calling them Alawi pigs and dogs.

Around 1 p.m., armed men shot and killed a witness's two young male neighbours after asking if they were Alawi. He also saw an armed man shoot another neighbour dead as he tried to run away. That same afternoon, four of his own family members including two women and a toddler were shot and killed.

Another witness saw armed men dragging a man outside. She then heard four shots and his mother crying and screaming. Someone threw her a blanket to cover the body. The attackers then said: "*if you dare take the body, we'll kill you*."

At around 4 p.m., an Alawi man heard armed men say: "*hit it with artillery 23*", referring to a pickup vehicle with a 23mm autocannon mounted to it. The armed men fired the weapon and he could hear the shops down the street being struck.

Throughout the day, there was widespread looting and destruction of property. According to seven witnesses, homes were ransacked, and personal possessions including cars, jewellery and watches were stolen.

Several witnesses with personal contacts among local authorities and security forces (that they referred to as "HTS") described how they were evacuated, passing through several checkpoints in Baniyas city. In one instance the family were allowed to pass after the driver confirmed that her family *"*are with us, they are with the State.*"* A witness who travelled with an "HTS" vehicle escort described the streets as chaotic with shooting and fires. Another Alawi witness described the scenes in Qusoor as "*like a horror movie."* Witnesses described they saw burnt cars, dead bodies on the street, and people looting shops.

An evacuated witness described in the Sunni part of Baniyas: *"*it *was another life there, there was nothing going on there."*

8 March

Killings of Alawi civilians, including women, continued on Saturday 8 March. Early in the morning, at approximately 7.30 a.m., two armed men came to the home of a young Alawi man on the outskirts of Al Qusoor neighbourhood. After asking inhabitants several times whether they were Shia or Alawi, the assailants took two young men outside and shot and killed them.

According to a witness whose family members had been killed the day before, General Security visited the neighbourhood during the morning and asked residents to show them where the bodies of the witness's relatives were.

On the morning of 8 March, several members of the same family were killed including one of the youngest victims, a one-and-a-half-year-old girl who was reportedly shot twice in the head.

During the afternoon of 8 March, people heard that they could go to the Masakin school where they would be safe. As a group of women, men and children walked to the Masakin school, an Alawi witness among them saw bodies on the streets, including of people she recognized. Another witness described General Security organizing vehicles, including a bus,

to bring Alawis to the Masakin school, and once there, they distributed tinned sardines and bread.

Witnesses reported that Masakin school was attacked during the night of 8 or 9 March, reportedly around 9.30 p.m. Unknown armed people attempted to enter the school. They opened fire on General Security who returned fire alongside their backup personnel. The Alawi civilians reportedly stayed in the Masakin school for a few days.

9 March

One Alawi witness returned to the neighbourhood on 9 March. He saw many bodies, including on the floor near the bakery and armed men dressed in black and camouflaged uniforms, some of them bearing the *Shahada* insignia.

Another Alawi witness who helped remove bodies from the street described seeing many dead bodies stored in a warehouse, including those of women and children as well as that of a man with mental disabilities.

An Alawi woman whose three close relatives had been killed went to Baniyas national hospital to look for the bodies of her family members. She described how the morgue was full of dozens of bodies in bags and drawers and on the floor. Most bodies had gunshots to the head or chest. She later found the bodies of her neighbour and her relatives, including a woman who had been shot in the head and chest.

Collection of bodies and burials

Witnesses described the presence of General Security during the collection of bodies and said that it was forbidden to take photographs. Families who wanted to bury their family members' bodies in the family's village were prevented from doing so by General Security who insisted that they instead be buried in Sheikh Ihlal cemetery in Baniyas. Surviving family members had not yet been provided with death certificates by the time they were interviewed.

Witnesses described family and members and neighbours burying loved ones in a mass grave in Sheikh Ihlal cemetery, subsequently visited by the Commission's team in June. Bulldozers dug pits in the ground and covered the bodies, arranged in a long line, with soil. A witness stated that bodies had numbers written on their brow. Another witness noted that at least one of the bodies he observed was burned, and another had been run over. Individuals interviewed by the Commission who had been involved in charge of the burials reported that at least 189 bodies had been buried there.

Aftermath

Residents of Al Qusoor continue to live in fear of further violence. As of late May, armed men continue to be deployed in the Al Qusoor neighbourhood. According to a witness, women are verbally abused by armed factions who remain in the neighbourhood, and told to wear hijab, leading women to do so out of fear. Witnesses described threatening graffiti on walls in the neighbourhood following the killings, including: "*If you come back, we come back, traitors. May Allah curse you*."

Alleged perpetrators

Witness accounts indicate the involvement of unidentified fighters and foreign fighters in killing and injuring civilians and looting. Investigations are ongoing with respect to those alleged to be responsible for these acts in Al Qusoor.

I. Latakia city, Latakia governorate

Al Daatour neighbourhood

3 – 5 March

During the days preceding 6 March, the security situation grew increasingly tense in Latakia city. In the predominantly Alawi Al Daatour neighbourhood, on 3 March, unknown

perpetrators reportedly threw a hand grenade at a security forces checkpoint. In response, interim authorities' security forces reportedly conducted a security operation which resulted in civilian casualties. In another incident, on 4 March, PFGFs reportedly attacked a General Security patrol near Al Azhari roundabout, killing two General Security members.[89] Information indicates that, in response, the Ministry of Defence deployed military vehicles - pick-up trucks with mounted weapons - and military personnel to the neighbourhood. Armed clashes reportedly persisted for several hours.[90] Investigations are ongoing.

Separately, a video circulated on social media on 3 March showing armed men riding in pickup trucks in the neighbourhood accompanied by a General Security member who was shouting sectarian slurs, including: "*Allah is the greatest...we will step on you, you pig Alawis... We will not give up until we get you all…*" General Security in Latakia announced that they had arrested the individual responsible and that they remained committed to protect citizens.[91]

Civilian casualties and the destruction of homes were reported during the above military operations, which SANA described as *"*neutralization*"* operations.[92] At least four civilians were reportedly killed in the neighbourhood.

Protests in Al Daatour neighbourhood, 6 March

During the early evening of 6 March, a protest took place sparked by the reported attacks on Beit Ana and Al Daliya villages (detailed in section V.A above), as well as by economic and social grievances, sectarian tensions and other security concerns.

The protests, attended by approximately 50 people were initially peaceful, however violence ensued when the interim authorities' security forces came with 4x4 vehicles carrying black flags and HTS flags displaying the signs of General Security and fired lethal ammunition into the crowd. Reportedly, one civilian was injured. Panic spread throughout the crowd, and the protest dispersed. The situation reportedly escalated that evening.

7 March

An estimated 27 people were killed in Al Daatour on 7 March. Early in the morning of 7 March, amid heavy gunfire, tanks and military vehicles with mounted machine guns entered the neighbourhood. From around 7.30 a.m., witnesses described armed men on the street carrying knives and black and white flags shouting: "God is greatest", "*nusayris*, pigs", "we have come to kill you".

One victim was shot and injured on the rooftop of a building. He heard sounds of heavy shooting and artillery and saw General Security members and vehicles in the streets.

An Alawi former civil servant reported that at around 10 a.m. seven or eight bearded armed men wearing military-style uniforms, and mostly with Idlib accents came to his home. At gunpoint they asked: "*Are you Alawi*?" On responding that he was, they said: *"You are an infidel pig, and it is our duty to kill you."* One of them punched him in the face and said: "*You Alawis are children of animals, a dirty sect, and your women are all prostitutes*."

In another location, around the same time, a group of armed men came to an apartment building where multiple generations of an Alawi family lived. Three men were taken from the building and shot in the head and chest outside, their bodies left on the street. An Alawi teacher was also killed, and his body set on fire in the street. Video footage showed multiple bodies lying in the street.

[89] According to Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) on 4 March: [General] Security... launched a large-scale security campaign in al-Datour neighbourhood and several surrounding neighbourhoods to arrest groups of Assad militia remnants who killed two members of the Ministry of Defence: https://www.sana.sy/?p=2195053

[90] https://www.sana.sy/?p=2195405

[91] Public Security Department in Latakia statement: (المراسل الحربي: https://web.telegram.org/a/#-1001457206059

[92] https://www.sana.sy/?p=2195405

8 March

Bodies remained on the street for days and some were reportedly subsequently buried without documentation. Following the killings, many local residents stayed at home out of fear. There was widespread property damage and looting of homes, shops, mobile stores, and cars on the streets.

Alleged perpetrators

Investigations are ongoing with respect to those alleged to be responsible for the killing of Alawi civilians in the neighbourhood.

A student helping with moving dead bodies of a woman and a baby on the street was approached by a General Security member who called him an Alawi pig and told him: "*you're crying over them? We're not finished, we will kill you all.*" He hit the student on the head with his rifle, fired in the air and burnt him with the hot rifle barrel.

General Security members also participated in looting and ordered an Alawi civilian to bark at a checkpoint.

Al Thawra highway neighbourhood, Latakia city

In the nearby Al Thawra highway neighbourhood, on 7 March at around 9.45 a.m., three armed men, including one from General Security came to an Alawi man's home. Two men in military uniform came inside, while the General Security member stayed at the door, guarding the entrance. One of the attackers took away his wife and young children while the other dragged him onto the living room floor. One of the men forced him to his knees, put a knife on his neck and asked him where he was hiding the weapons and money and called him an Alawi pig before taking hundreds of dollars, his wife's phone and her jewellery. When they brought his wife and children back into the living room, they reportedly threatened to execute them if they left their house.

Alleged perpetrators

According to the Alawi man, General Security had publicly promised to arrest those who were looting and attacking people, however he had not dared to file a complaint, since they had been involved in robbing his family.

J. Ain al Arous village, Latakia governorate

Ain al Arous is a village east of Al-Qardaha in the Latakia countryside. At least 38 people were killed in and around the village on 7 and 8 March, of which the Commission was able to verify seven.

According to an Alawi woman, several armed men dressed in black came to her house in a white pick-up with Idlib license plates at approximately 5 p.m. on 7 March. They kicked the door down, searched her house, and checked her relative's identity document. They shot him in the head, killing him outside his house. They then shot around the witness's feet, and shouted: "Go inside, Alawi dog, that's how you need to be killed."

After the men had left, the witness went outside screaming and crying to see her relative. A man came to help her. Having heard her scream, the armed men returned and shot and killed him too. They started shooting around the witness again, warning her to not go near the body. The witness fled to a nearby forest from where she could hear gunfire and the movements of armed men.

An Alawi man was at home when he heard shooting around 3 p.m. on 7 March. He fled with his wife and children to nearby fields. Later that afternoon, he learned that his brother had been shot and killed.

At approximately 9 a.m. the following morning, three armed men in a red Hyundai Santa Fe car shot and killed four women inside a house, shooting them in the head. The dead included a woman with disabilities and an 88-year-old woman.

Collection of bodies and burials

On returning to the village on 10 March, a witness described the village as a ghost town with only armed men still in the village. Villagers took risks to bury the dead. He described it as a difficult day, but they had to: "*to bury is to honour the dead.*"

Looting

The attackers also looted the village for several days starting March 7, taking mobile phones, money, jewellery, laptops, gas cylinders and a deceased woman's wheelchair. Many homes were set on fire and destroyed, and people were not able to return.

Investigations are ongoing with respect to those alleged to be responsible for the killing of Alawi civilians in Ain al Arous.

K. Tartus City, Tartus governorate

Tensions in Tartus began on 6 March. An Alawi teacher from the city described attending a peaceful civilian demonstration against the authorities in the city on the evening of 6 March. However, at approximately 6.30 p.m., interim security forces shot towards the crowd, dispersing the protestors. A security operation ensued, with military reinforcements reportedly entering Tartus and the interim authorities reportedly declaring a curfew in Alawi-majority neighbourhoods.

During the morning of 7 March, vehicles with armed men entered southern neighbourhoods of the city. Witnesses described men firing weapons, damaging property and looting cars and shops. An Alawi tradesman living in the south-west of Tartus city heard gunshots and artillery on nearby Thawra street and armed men on his street shouting: "Alawis you are pigs." From his apartment balcony, at around noon, he saw how a man riding a motorcycle in the Arid neighbourhood was shot in the head and killed by a man in desert-style uniform, with a *kafiyeh* headdress, driving a Hyundai Santa Fe. Investigations into events in Tartus city on 7 and 8 March are ongoing.

L. Arzona village, Tartus countryside

In Arzona village in the Tartus countryside, there were sounds of heavy gunfire during the night of 6 March. An Alawi woman from Arzona village described how she and her family were woken around 8 a.m. on 7 March by the sounds of gunshots. She saw white muddy pick-up vehicles arrive and armed men in civilian clothes with long beards approaching the home of a man who owned a kiosk that sold petrol and other goods. The armed men demanded that he fill up their vehicles. On protesting that there was a curfew and he shouldn't leave his house, the men dragged him outside and forced him to open the kiosk and fuel the vehicles. They took everything they could from the kiosk and his home and set the kiosk on fire. Before they left, they shot him several times, killing him. Another man came out of the house to see what was happening, and the armed men shot and killed him too. The witness fled to the forest for safety with her children. As she was running away, she saw that the neighbourhood had been set on fire.

M. Hattaniya village, Tartus governorate

Looting and destruction of property

On 8 March, heavily armed convoys of approximately 150 vehicles, including tanks, moved sequentially through Baniyas, Barmaya, Al-Squbleh, Hattaniya, and Midan before reaching Hamam Wasil in the late afternoon on 9 March. The convoys reportedly carried out shelling, killings and looting in the villages they passed through. The electricity network was affected, cutting off both power and communications.

One witness recalled that, as the factions advanced toward Barmaya village, he was warned by a friend to "*not resist when they loot*." To protect their homes, some civilians reportedly left their doors open, hoping that the factions would not cause structural damage, but would only loot household items.

On the morning of 9 March, armed men arrived in Hattaniya, and civilians fled towards farmland and a nearby valley. From their hiding place, witnesses observed heavily armed men wearing beige or khaki military attire and speaking Arabic with a Hama accent. One witness noted that flags bearing the *Shahada* were attached to the vehicles, including tanks and DshKs. Civilian homes were looted, with one witness estimating that around 50 houses were destroyed or set on fire, while drones hovered overhead. One witness overheard one of the armed men saying to another: "*even if you set all the houses on fire, they won't get out of their hiding place*."

Killings

As looting continued on 9 March, another group of armed men speaking with a Baniyas accent and others reportedly foreign, found a group of civilians hiding in the bushes, after they overheard some children crying. They separated the men from the women and children and took them away. Witnesses found the bodies of six of the men, apparently executed, near and inside a *maqam,* a sacred Alawi religious site of spiritual and communal importance. On 10 March, family members of the victims buried the bodies where they had been found, with at least five laid to rest in a single grave adjacent to the *maqam*. On the same day, another two men were reportedly killed while on their way back to their homes. A woman who was injured by a stray bullet later succumbed to her wounds.

Aftermath

On 10 March, a meeting took place between the village mukhtars and the General Security during which the General Security asked that the people return to their homes and said that there will be "*no more killings or looting*." After information about this meeting spread within the community, many returned. They found their homes looted, destroyed or set on fire. Video footage and open-source material also confirmed that houses had been burnt down in the village.

N. Tal Salhab, Hama governorate

On 7 March, groups of armed men conducted a series of raids in the Alawi-majority village of Tal Salhab, located in North-West Hama. During these raids, people were insulted, beaten, detained, and 11 people were reportedly executed. Houses were also looted and reportedly set on fire.

Prior to these events, General Security had an established presence in the town, including several checkpoints at its main entrances, and had carried out a settlement process as of early January. On 6 March, the General Security imposed a curfew, with residents informed through social media that they should not move around from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.

Raids, torture and looting

The 7 March raids started at dawn and lasted until around 6 p.m. with a witness reporting seeing around 100 vehicles carrying men firing light weapons. Two eyewitnesses described how their homes were raided by at least three different groups, each behaving violently, beating civilians, including women and children, and abducting some men.

In one case, a group of around 15 armed men came to a villager's home in the morning. Five entered, stating they were searching for weapons, and then asked the men for their identity documents. They beat women and children, while the men, including a 90-year-old man, were asked to lay down in front of the house. The men were then violently beaten, including with rifles.

Another home was raided by three men who looted any valuables they could find, including household appliances, and destroyed what they left behind. One put a gun to the head of a civilian man and asked a woman to recite the *Shahada*, indicating they were about to kill him. The man was eventually released after the armed men consulted their *"Sheikh"*, who was dressed in civilian clothing, on whether they should execute him.

Killings

Multiple witnesses reported civilians killed on 7 March. A survivor collected five men's bodies around 9 p.m. amidst large pools of blood in the streets and identified one of his relatives, reportedly a former SAA conscript, being shot in a video circulating online. According to his relative's widow, her husband had been taken from his house during a raid around 9 a.m.

A man detained during a raid on his house saw at least four corpses in the street that day and witnessed the execution of a young man, shot in the head from the back. The witness stated that residents continued to find bodies of people executed around the town up to two weeks after the attack, including the body of a man who had his throat slit on the road to Sqilya village.

A witness reported that a former SAA member who had participated in a settlement with General Security was shot in his house immediately after armed men entered. In the evening, the witness saw General Security members collecting five bodies, including two civilians he identified by name. He says they loaded the bodies into the car "*as if they were dead animals*".

Treatment in State custody

A man arrested during a house raid was taken with a group of detainees to General Security's Tal Salhab branch where he was held in a former government detention facility. He was gathered with a group of other detained men in front of the building for around 40 minutes where they were beaten, called pigs, dogs, with men forced to bark, and to say: "*Ahmad al-Sharaa* is our leader."

The survivor described the detention facility as an underground room fit for around 40 people, but he estimated that hundreds of people were held there, including elders and at least one child. All detainees bore marks of violence with many covered in blood, the smell was unbearable, and people could barely move in the cell. Detainees received food once a day and a little water. Detainees were threatened to be killed by their jailers, who allowed a group of civilians from Hama to enter the prison to beat those detained. The man was released after four days, without being interrogated.

Residents in Tal Salhab told the Commission that hundreds of civilians were detained on 7 March; many were subsequently released but dozens were still missing weeks after the attack.

Looting

During raids, armed men stole people's possessions, including cell phones, money and gold. Some residents were forced to hand over their car keys. A woman was compelled to bring cash, phones and gold hidden in their house under the threat that her husband would be executed. Shops on the main street were also looted, including supermarkets and electronic shops. The owner of a shop who rushed in the morning to secure his shop was reportedly detained by armed men driving as part of a convoy of cars affiliated to the General Security.

Aftermath

A resident described a prevailing climate of fear amongst Tal Salhab inhabitants after the 7 March attacks, with streets emptying at nightfall. A few days after the attacks, a group of men decided to hide in a remote area in the mountains for several days as they heard that General Security was preparing to conduct combing operations in the town. They found men from other villages also hiding in the mountains, some after they had walked for over a day, as they did not feel protected and had no weapons to defend themselves from potential attackers.

O. Rasafa, Hama governorate

On the evening of 6 March, General Security imposed a curfew in Masyaf area, including in Rasafa, a predominantly Alawi village, following clashes reported in the area. General Security members had manned three checkpoints in and around Rasafa.

Witnesses told the Commission that at the time of the attack most male residents had gone through individual "settlement" while those who refused had left the village. There were no reported military clashes in the vicinity of the village before the curfew.

Nevertheless, in the raids that ensued from 7 to 9 March at least 65 civilians were reported to have been killed, including women and children. The Commission verified 24 of the killings. Large-scale looting and destruction of property were also documented.

Raids, abductions

Around 7 a.m. on 7 March, a convoy of over 100 vehicles entered Rasafa. Some vehicles were equipped with mounted heavy weapons with lights on and honking. Residents heard shooting and unrest with chants calling for *jihad*, as groups of armed men started patrolling the streets.

Soon after, armed men started raiding houses in the village. Eyewitnesses described how masked men armed with guns, knives and swords entered family homes and immediately started beating and insulting those inside. They gathered women, children and an elderly man in one room, and threatened to kill family members as they looted all valuables. In one case, three men were dragged to the streets, while at least one of them was forced to bark like a dog. The three men were executed shortly afterwards.

In another case, a group of five armed men forced those in the house to hand over their money, gold and mobile phones, before ordering all those inside - men, women and children - to exit the house. Once in the street, the armed men argued amongst themselves on the fate of the victims, before ordering women and children to go back to the house. All males, including a young teenager were forced into a pickup and taken away. One of abductees who escaped would later tell the villagers that the armed men executed the abductees on the outskirts of the village.

Killings

Two residents whose homes were raided on 7 March in the morning reported armed men telling them they had "orders to kill everyone, including the children, because they do not deserve to live". One witness saw two men executed near their house immediately after they had been abducted from their family house during a raid in the evening of 7 March. The body of another man detained with them was later found in another part of the village. Another witness saw five men dragged from a home and onto the street by the attackers who killed four on the spot. A third eyewitness saw two men detained during a raid being beaten and dragged away by the armed men, and then shot at close range.

Several eyewitnesses described how they retrieved many bodies of men, women and children, including some displaying signs of mutilation, in the aftermath of the attack. One witness described how the bodies of several of her relatives, including children ranging from three to ten years old, were found on 9 March in the evening in their living room. They had lost contact with the relatives on 7 March in the morning, right after their house was raided. The body of a female relative was on the ground next to her three children, still holding a child by the hand. All of them had been executed by close range gunshots to the head.

Mutilation and burial of corpses

Some bodies were reportedly desecrated by mutilation, including that of a man who was killed after he was detained in a raid and tortured. In a video authenticated by the Commission, the man's father reported receiving a call from the mobile phone of his son, during which one of the captors told him he would kill his son, removing his heart. The father later found his son's mutilated body, with the heart removed and the thorax cut open.

Local sources told the Commission that they collected the bodies of victims when they felt safe to leave their homes, and that they had to bury them by their own means. On 9 March, one elderly relative went to collect two bodies left in the streets and buried the bodies near their home. That same day, he saw armed men arriving with one pick-up bringing about 20 dead bodies from the streets to an unknown location.

One of the residents who lost several family members in the massacre described how they too had to resort to burying loved ones themselves in a field near their family home. Another elderly man had to carry the corpses of three of his sons using a wheelbarrow, with the help of women, "*because there were no men left to assist.*"

Looting

All witnesses described how the village was completely looted by the attackers, reporting that community members lost all their gold, car batteries, gas cylinders and mobile phones, amongst other belongings. An eyewitness stated that looting was carried out by the armed groups which conducted the attacks but also by members of the Bedouin community, identified by the eyewitness through their dialect and outfits. Some houses and shops were burnt after they were looted. One of the witnesses reported that up until 10 March, groups of masked armed men dressed in black continued threatening the residents, asking for money, gold and mobile phones.

Alleged perpetrators

Eyewitnesses stated that attackers comprised Syrians with Idlib, Hama and Aleppo accents, as well as foreigners, some wearing black military uniforms they identified as General Security, others civilian plainclothes and some with headbands labelled "there is no god but God". A resident speculated that some came from nearby military base known as the "research centre".

Complaint to the police

Several residents reportedly went to report the killings and other violations to the police, also intending to obtain documents needed to register the deaths in the civil registry. Around 10 days after the killing, one resident was finally able to meet with a police officer after several failed attempts. The police officer initially insisted that the victims were killed by remnants, but the man stressed that the killers entered Rasafa while the General Security was present in and around the town. The police report eventually stated that the killing had been perpetrated by unknown armed men. Around six weeks after the events, no information had been provided to the interviewee regarding any action undertaken by security forces to investigate the killing.

P. Simultaneous arrests in the Al Qadam neighbourhood of Damascus city, Damascus governorate

At approximately the same time as the above incidents occurred in the coastal areas, another combing operation took place in the Al Qadam neighbourhood in Damascus, which comprises mainly Sunni, Alawi, Christian and Druze communities. They were looking for former SAA personnel and individuals alleged to have links to the former government. Homes of Alawi families were raided at around 4 a.m. on 7 March. According to witnesses at least 23 unarmed Alawi men including *inter alia* an SAA defector, a doctor and a retired teacher, were detained in different search operations, and some were reportedly beaten. In one case, armed men wearing black uniforms and masks, speaking in Damascene accents, who appeared to be General Security, violently raided an Alawi family's home searching for weapons. They woke a man and reportedly took him away for questioning. When his relatives pleaded with them not to take him, they were told to *"*shut up or we'll send him back to you in a coffin*."*

Despite repeated attempts by three families to seek information from General Security and local authorities, including at the Al Qadam police station, regarding the whereabouts of their relatives, General Security denied knowledge of the operation and of any arrests. The whereabouts of the men remains unknown at the time of writing. The Commission's investigations into this incident are ongoing.

Q. Allegations of abductions of women from Hama, Tartus, Latakia Governorates

Threats of abduction of women and dehumanizing language during the coastal violence

The Commission further documented dehumanizing language against women and threats of abduction and forced marriage by members of armed factions, in the days leading up to and during the March events. During the events, Alawi women were referred to by some armed men as "*slaves*" and "*spoils of war*," or were told to "*go to Idlib to prepare for Jihad*," particularly in the aftermath of incidents in which multiple male members of a household were executed.

In one case, armed men in Tal Salhab were heard chanting "*Hear us Alawis, dogs, we will kill your kids and rape your women, we will kill your children*." In other examples from 7 March, women in Rasafa and Snobar were threatened with sexual violence and being "*taken as sabaya*" (war captives) after armed individuals executed their male relatives. Similarly, in Al Qabu Al-Awamiyah, Latakia governorate, a gunman told a witness: "*Alawi pigs, we will end you. You are infidels. Your men should be killed by the sword, and your women used for entertainment*."

In one particularly disturbing case, occurring in the lead up to the 6 March escalation, one woman was repeatedly raped by armed members from an unidentified faction after they searched her home for weapons. In addition to the sexual violence, the victim was severely beaten, subjected to religious slurs, and referred to as a "*spoil of war*." The assault continued over a period of several days, during which the perpetrators discussed "*plans to prepare*" her for relocation to another governorate, where, according to them, other women had already been taken. She was able to escape her ordeal by fleeing her Alawi hometown alongside other residents following the attacks on 7 March.

Abductions investigated by the Commission

Victim accounts and credible information obtained also indicate that, in the weeks preceding and following the events of March, at least six Alawi women were abducted in several Syrian governorates by unknown individuals. At the time of writing, the whereabouts of at least two of these women remain unknown, and the rest reported to have been released. The Commission received further credible reports of abductions of dozens of other Alawi women. The Commission's investigations into these incidents are ongoing.

Testimonies from victims, along with video footage and photos obtained by the Commission indicate that at least two of the six women were abducted for the purpose of forced marriage. They were held at undisclosed locations, and where the alleged perpetrators appeared to maintain control over their movements and physical environment. In other cases, families were asked to pay ransom to secure their release.

In one of the cases investigated by the Commission, in early 2025, masked men dressed in black and wearing black headbands inscribed with "There is no god but God" abducted a woman from the street in one of the governorates. They took her to a destroyed building in a remote area where she was gang-raped, severely beaten, and subjected to insults denigrating her religion. The victim was subsequently sold to an older man, who restrained her physically and used force and coercion to prevent her from escaping. She was then forcibly married to this man and taken to another governorate. During her captivity, she was prohibited from leaving the premises and was subjected to repeated rape and beatings. Her captor referred to her with slurs such as *"nusayri,"* "*pig*," and "*whore*."

Response by the interim authorities and threats against women's rights defenders

In the cases investigated by the Commission, inquiries into the abductions of women were initiated by the interim authorities, pursuant to complaints filed by the families.

However, some victims and their families reported facing obstacles in obtaining assistance from local law enforcement in seeking the release and recovery of the missing women. One interviewee recounted that, although police officials said that they were aware of the identity of the alleged perpetrator and the location of their abducted daughter, no action had been

taken yet to recover her. The Commission is not aware of any individuals being arrested or prosecuted yet in connection with these abductions.

Some family members also faced threats and intimidation for seeking accountability. One family who reported their missing relative were treated as suspects themselves, were subjected to beatings during interrogation and coerced into making a public statement. In another case, a relative of an abducted woman was threatened and told that "*something will happen to [them]*" after repeatedly inquiring with the local authorities about progress in the investigation.

Others who publicly advocated and called for investigations into the mounting reports of abductions of Alawi women faced defamation, harassment and intimidation, including against their family members, for speaking out. A woman human rights defender who publicly called for investigations into the alleged abductions of women received death threats from unknown individuals on social media and private messaging applications. In April 2025, the General Security in Idlib closed the centre of her organization, which advocates for women's rights and against forced marriage, citing protection concerns for the defender following the online defamation campaign that had begun against her.

II. Specific incidents impacting civilians during combing operations in Homs and Hama, January-March 2025

The below four subsections (A-D) summarize events occurring in the context of combing operations in four different locations in Homs and Hama governorates between January-March 2025.

A. Fahel village

Between approximately 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. on 23 January, an estimated 200 General Security personnel conducted a combing operation in Fahel. General Security members first established checkpoints at the entrance of the village, fired their weapons in the air, and engaged in searches, targeting a limited number of houses belonging to people who had previously undertaken a 'settlement' with General Security.

Arbitrary detention

Twenty-one men were arrested in Fahel during the raids between 9.30 a.m. and 11 a.m. on 23 January. Armed men consistently introduced themselves as General Security and told families that all men detained would be taken for interrogation in detention facilities run by the caretaker government, and that those who did not commit any wrongdoings would be subsequently released.

The 21 captives were gathered at the main square of the village, and subsequently transferred to another location which required crossing several checkpoints operated by General Security members. During the journey, men detained in other villages were placed in the back of a pick-up truck transporting those detained in Fahel.

The same day around 11 a.m., two other Fahel residents were detained at a checkpoint near Fahel, after they were identified as Alawis by General Security members at a checkpoint.

That same evening, seven men were transferred to Homs Central Prison where they were held with other men detained during raids conducted in Western Rural Homs. All were subjected to severe beating and released on 28 January. The detainees were never brought to a court, nor provided with legal counsel.

Killings

In the evening of 23 January, Fahel residents found the bodies of a retired armed forces officer, a conscript, and an air force technician, all detained earlier during the raids. The next day, residents organized a search for others who had gone missing since the raids. Around 2 p.m., an additional 10 bodies were found in the outskirts of the village, and the body of another man was retrieved in the lands surrounding the village, all detained in the 23 January

raids. The same day, the bodies of the two men were found near the General Security checkpoint where they had been detained, suggesting they were summarily executed shortly after they were detained. All but two bodies displayed wounds consistent with gunshots at close range, with some showing signs of lethal injuries caused by knives, hammer or similar items.

According to local community sources, some of the bodies were collected by the General Security, with the stated purpose to determine the cause of the death, and transported to medical facilities in and around Homs. The bodies of most of the victims were however not examined by a forensic expert.

Status of victims

All 14 individuals executed after they were detained during house raids had been members of the former government's armed forces, with 13 having served as officers. At the time of the killing, however, all were either retired, dismissed, or serving in civilian functions, and all had participated in the State-led "settlement" process. The two men killed near the checkpoint were civilians. All 16 victims were Alawi.

Looting

Most houses raided were subjected to looting, including money, gold, computers, and other valuables. One source noted that some looted items would subsequently appear for sale on social media channels operated by an armed group. Vehicles were also stolen, while personal items, including religious artefacts, art or musical instruments were vandalized during the raids.

Humiliating or degrading treatment

All eyewitnesses recall that General Security members insulted residents on the basis of their religious affiliation, calling them *"pigs"* and *"animals,"* and some were forced to imitate howling dogs.

Alleged perpetrators

All interviewees described the armed men who conducted the raids as wearing military clothes or black uniforms, similar to those used by the General Security and the Military Operation Command. Eyewitnesses stated that perpetrators spoke Arabic with local Homs dialect, suggesting that some of the alleged perpetrators came from nearby Al Houla village, or its surroundings. One of the groups participating in the raid campaign had mounted a loudspeaker on a car to play religious songs as they moved through the village. Two eyewitnesses also claimed they identified some of the attackers as locals from this region, and one witness claimed that during one of the *raids, a masked armed men said: "we are your neighbours, this is why we need to mask ourselves."* Moreover, as detailed above, several men detained in the operation were transferred to State-run Homs central prison, a journey that required crossing General Security checkpoints.

On 27 January, two representatives of the caretaker Homs governorate met with community leaders in Fahel, stated that the violations had been committed by "criminal gangs" that entered the village after the combing operation had finished. One of the two officials later publicly acknowledged however that the perpetrators were part of their troops.

Testimonies and supporting evidence obtained by the Commission indicate that the same men who conducted the raids and arrests committed executions. The fact that some detainees were released from Homs central prison indicates that their arrestors were affiliated to State security forces.

B. Violations allegedly committed in Mreimin

Mreimin is a village located around 5 km from Fahel, its residents mainly comprise those of the Alawi and Mursheedin faiths. In the early afternoon of 23 January, dozens of General Security members deployed in different areas of the village. Armed men shot in the air, compelling residents to stay home. Witnesses indicated that at least four distinct groups of

armed men took part in the raids targeting residential areas in Mreimin, and that they acted in an apparently coordinated fashion as they spread across different neighbourhoods.

Looting

Around 70 houses were looted, including gold and other valuables, money, and oil tanks, under threat of violence, including threats to kill female family members.

Arbitrary detention and torture

During the campaign, General Security members detained at least 13 adult men. Among those detained were former members of the previous government's security forces, as well as civilians. According to several witnesses, all members in former security forces detained had previously undertaken the State-led "settlement".

The men who had been detained were gathered near the main square of the town, where they were subjected to different forms of physical violence such as whipping, slapping, and beatings with butts of rifles, metal bars and hammers.

Killings

The body of a person detained during 23 January home raids in Mreimin, a technician allegedly involved in installing video surveillance equipment in Sednaya military prison, was later found in the outskirts of the village. The body of another, allegedly a former Military Security Directorate officer, was retrieved from a hospital in Homs. His body reportedly displayed marks of beatings, indicating that he was killed by beatings and torture.

Humiliating or degrading treatment

Beatings were accompanied by derogatory language with sectarian undertones. Survivors stated they were repeatedly named "*nusayris*", *"pigs" and "animals"* by General Security personnel. Several were beaten to their genital areas including their buttocks, resulting in significant injuries.

Armed men took down religious symbols of the Murshid sect, including those traditionally placed near the doorstep, in some cases asking young men to stand on these artefacts, forcing them to desecrate religious symbols at gun point. Those who would refuse to do so were subjected to severe beatings. Some residents were forced to lay half-naked on the ground while they were whipped and beaten.

Most of the men detained during raids on Mreimin were released the same day. One was released from Homs Central Prison on 28 January, having been transferred from an informal detention facility earlier, and where he was held along with other detainees apprehended during the combing campaign on Western Rural Homs, including Fahel.

Response of the caretaker authorities

On 24 January, the State-run SANA news agency issued a report condemning violations in Mreimin, stating that "*security forces conducted a precise combing campaign in Western Homs, targeting outlaw elements*". The statement specifically condemned violations affecting "*religious beliefs*". The authorities stated that "*criminal gangs*" impersonated security personnel to commit abuses against the people, and that several suspects had been detained and referred to the judiciary to be prosecuted "*in accordance with the law*". The statement added that: "*We affirm our commitment to restoring rights to their owners and compensating all those affected for the losses they incurred as a result of these violations. A specialized committee will be formed to monitor the assessment of damages and provide compensation according to transparent mechanisms that guarantee the full rights of residents, in coordination with the relevant authorities*."

While at least three men were reportedly apprehended by the authorities following the raid and some of the vehicles stolen were returned to residents, at the time of the interview, three vehicles had not yet been returned to their owners, nor the vast amount of valuables stolen.

At the time of writing, the outcome of the specialized committee that the caretaker authorities said they would establish to look into damage and deprivation of property, or steps taken to hold perpetrators accountable were not yet known.

Alleged perpetrators

As in Fahel, eyewitnesses in Mreimin described attackers as members of General Security, wearing black and military outfits, some with Syrian Homs dialect -suggesting that some might have come from the nearby region of Al Houla, while others were foreign fighters. The statement issued by SANA and the transfer of at least one detainee to Homs central prison indicated the operation was conducted by State agents.

Local sources suggested that some assailants were motivated by revenge for past violations, including with regards to massacres perpetrated by the former pro-government security forces during early stages of the conflict.

C. Attack on Anz, 27 January

Anz is a small village located in Eastern Hama governorate on the outskirts of Salamiye city, comprising Sunni and Alawis residents. Some residents who left the village after 8 December and returned in January faced threats and found their homes, lands and agricultural equipment looted and, in some cases, their homes occupied. A General Security checkpoint had been set up in the vicinity of the village prior to 27 January, when five men were killed and five others injured in a night raid by men identifying themselves as General Security.

At 4 a.m., four vehicles entered the village and several masked men identifying themselves as General Security raided the house of at least two Alawi families searching for weapons. The masked men gathered women and children in one room and forced them to hand over all valuables at gunpoint. The gunmen also stole the keys of a truck in which they put 40 sheep belonging to one of the families whose house was raided.

At least 10 men were dragged outside at gunpoint and lined up in a square at the entrance of the village, their hands tied behind their backs. The armed men opened fire on them, killing five men, including one boy and an elder person, and injuring five others. The attack was conducted in around 30 minutes.

When the General Security members interrogated some Anz residents on the circumstances of the killing, its members blamed the "regime remnants" for the killings. No further information on the investigation had been provided to the community as of two months after the attack. According to a local source, the victims' funerals were conducted in Tal Salhab town (around 50 kilometres from Anz) since the family did not feel safe holding the ceremonies in their village.

Alleged perpetrators

Among the armed men present, it is reported that there were masked armed men wearing black outfits labelled "General Security", and that some of the attackers spoke in Arabic with Hama dialect.

D. Attacks leading to displacement of civilians in Arzet

Arzet is a village in Hama subdistrict, north-west of Hama city, overwhelmingly comprised of Alawis, surrounded by Sunni-populated villages. Following the takeover of Aleppo by the HTS-led coalition on 30 November, a number of Arzet residents left fearing retaliation. Though some came back in late December after they felt they would not be targeted by the new authorities, witnesses reported being exposed to increased hate speech and threats with sectarian undertones from neighbouring villages, including in mosques during Friday prayers.

Hate speech and related violence against Alawi residents of Arzet appears to have been linked to the perception that some had supported the previous government's campaigns of persecution conducted against mainly Sunni residents of neighbouring villages, such as Khattab, including attacks on civilians, arbitrary detention and deaths in detention, as well as violations of housing, land and property rights.

A State-led "settlement" process for Arzet residents was conducted by the General Security office in Masyaf starting in December 2024. During this period, General Security set up a checkpoint at the entrance of Arzet, run by 20 to 25 personnel, including some recruited from nearby villages. The checkpoint was placed under the authority of a Khattab resident who had been displaced to Idlib in the conflict and had returned to his hometown after December 2024. Sectarian insults against residents were reported at this checkpoint.

Between January and March, a series of attacks were reported, including most significantly a combing operation on 31 January that included civilians and armed men from neighbouring Khattab, and an attack occurring on the day of a local so-called "victory march" – again comprising both armed men and civilians on 7 March. At least 29 Arzet residents were killed during these events. Following the 31 January attack, several families from Khattab, Shiha, Halfaya and Idlib reportedly moved into the houses of Arzet inhabitants who had left the village. Additionally, some Arzet residents were allegedly forcibly expelled from their houses. Village residents sought protection from General Security on several occasions and were informed by a Khattab security official from the interim government that an investigation was being carried out to identify the perpetrators of the killing of 8 civilians as a result of the raid on 31 January, but there was no follow-up. Following the 7 March attack, in which 21 civilians were killed, all Arzet Alawi residents left the village. In April, a former fighter from an armed group affiliated to HTS posted on his social media accounts that the name of Arzet village had been changed to *"New Khattab"*.

Alleged perpetrators

The armed men who conducted the raids and killings on 31 January included elements wearing General Security black uniforms, some speaking with Hama accents. Several individuals reportedly involved in violence, killings and subsequent occupation of properties during and in the aftermath of the 7 March attacks were identified by name by residents, who reportedly shared information with the caretaker authorities' security forces prior to the incident. Occupation of property was reportedly conducted by civilians hailing from nearby villages, including Khattab, as well as by HTS and Ahrar Al Sham members, with some houses daubed in paint as "*assigned to Hay'at Tahrir Al Sham*" and "*assigned to Ahrar Al Alsham*". Looting was reportedly conducted by a variety of parties, including civilians. General Security members present in the village did not take necessary measures to protect private properties.

Annex III – Applicable law

I. Applicable law

Following the collapse of the Assad-led government on 8 December 2024 and its replacement by first a provisional government then an interim government 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 interim 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.

II. National legal framework

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 interim 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 interim 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.

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.

It should be noted that the bulk of events covered in this report predate the adoption of the Constitutional Declaration. The legislation to be clarified following its adoption, however, 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.

III. International legal framework

Generally speaking, a domestic change in government, whether through domestic constitutional or legal means or through extra-legal means, does not alter the multilateral international legal obligations of that state.[93] Thus, the question of the Syrian State's obligations under public international law, including both international human rights and international humanitarian treaty and customary international law obligations, remain unchanged. Notwithstanding ambiguities concerning the political recognition of the new governmental authorities by some Member States and international organizations, as a matter

[93] See, International Law Commission, Fourth report on the Law of Treaties by Mr. G. G. Fitzmaurice, Special Rapporteur (1959), A/CN.4/120, pages 54-58, (https://legal.un.org/ilc/documentation/english/a_cn4_120.pdf), citing 1929 Harvard Study and E. de Vattel, Le droit des gens ou principes de la hi naturelle appliques a la conduite et aux affaires des nations et des souverains, vol. I, reproduction of books I and II of 1758 edition (Washington, D.C., Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1916), book IT, chap. XII, para. 185.

of public international law, the question is whether such authorities exercise state functions both domestically and internationally.[94]

There is currently no dispute as to whether the interim authorities exercise the effective functions of the Syrian government both internally and externally. To a lesser extent than for the previous government, there remain areas of either partial, or absence of, control of territory for the interim government. This does not appear to have affected the relations between the interim government and other states or international organizations. There is also no indication of any other entity challenging the authority of the interim government to speak for the Syrian state. It follows then that the overarching international legal framework as set out in numerous Commission reports remains in effect.[95]

Though discussed in part below, 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.[96]

A. International human rights law

The Syrian Arab Republic remained a party to those international human rights treaties it previous 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).

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.[97]

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.[98]

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[94] As the ICRC's 2016 Commentary to Article 3 common to the Four Geneva Conventions noted in para. 399, "Under international law, the key condition for the existence of a government is its effectiveness, that is, its ability to exercise effectively the functions usually assigned to a government within the confines of a State's territory, including the maintenance of law and order. Put another way, effectiveness is the ability to exercise State functions both internally and externally, i.e. in relation to other States." Citing See Hersch Lauterpacht, 'Recognition of Governments: I', Columbia Law Review, Vol. 45, 1945, pp. 815–864, especially at 825–830, and Malcolm N. Shaw, International Law, 5th edition, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 376–382. See also Siegfried Magiera, 'Governments', version of September 2007, in Rüdiger Wolfrum (ed.), Max Planck Encyclopedia of Public International Law, Oxford University Press, http://opil.ouplaw.com/home/EPIL, paras 14 and 17.

[95] See, most recently, 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).

[96] 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.

[97] 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.

[98] 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.

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.[99] 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

Similarly, 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.[100] 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.

The Commission first found intensity and duration of the conflict between the former government and non-state armed groups, combined with the increased organizational capabilities of then anti-government armed groups, met the legal threshold for a non-international armed conflict as of February 2012.[101] Two questions arise in the present context. First, whether the overarching non-international armed conflict that began at least as of February 2012 concluded prior to the start of the events covered in this report. Second, if that armed conflict has ended, did a new armed conflict emerge in light of the facts established in the present report.

Protocol II Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which contains a definition of non-international armed conflicts for the purpose of that protocol is not applicable in the Syrian Arab Republic. The text of Article 3 Common to the Genevan Conventions is silent as to a definition beyond stating that it is an armed conflict not of an international character. Thus, the most authoritative source of the customary rule comes from the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in the Tadić Decision on the Defence Motion for Interlocutory Appeal on Jurisdiction, 1995, para. 70,

> "...an armed conflict exists whenever there is a resort to armed force between States or protracted armed violence between governmental authorities and organized armed groups or between such groups within a State. International humanitarian law applies from the initiation of such armed conflicts and extends beyond the cessation of hostilities until a general conclusion of peace is reached; or, in the case of internal conflicts, a peaceful settlement is achieved. Until that moment, international humanitarian law continues to apply in the whole territory of the warring States or, in the case of internal conflicts, the whole territory under the control of a party, whether or not actual combat takes place there."

Numerous subsequent rulings by international tribunals have adopted this approach, with subsequent case law setting our specific criteria concerning the level of intensity and organisation required for the application of international humanitarian law in non-international armed conflicts. Although there is broad consensus on determining the beginning of the application of international humanitarian law, there is less authority

[99] See footnote 94 above.

[100] 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).

[101] A/HRC/21/50, Annex II, para. 1-3. With that determination, the Commission applied international humanitarian law, including article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, as well as customary international humanitarian law alongside IHRL.

concerning the end of non-international armed conflict beyond the requirements that the conflict no longer meets the intensity and organisational criteria and that a peaceful settlement would be achieved. In the event that the prior non-international armed conflict between the former government and the armed groups that opposed it but now constitute the armed forces of the new interim government has concluded, the intensity and organisation requirements would need to be met anew for international humanitarian law to be applicable.

In the present case, former Syrian State forces, including the entire military and security apparatus, effectively ceased operations and disbanded as of 8 December 2024. Such forces were formally abolished during a "Revolution Victory Conference" on 29 January 2025. Amnesties for former conscript soldiers were announced and "settlement centres" were established to collect weapons from and settle the status of former military and intelligence personnel. One view is that the capitulation of the former government and its armed forces amounted to a peaceful settlement, with hostilities that had largely ceased. The formal dissolution of the former government's military and security apparatus would have meant that such groups abandoned their organisational structure. In this reading, the non-international armed conflict involving the former government against then non-state armed groups would have effectively ceased in late 2024 and early 2025.

Another view is that the conflict did not end at that point and continued through the events described in this report. As the International Criminal Court has stated, fighting need not be continuous or uninterrupted for the intensity criteria to be met, in particular when parties are preparing for campaigns or operations.[102] In this reading, the surrender of the civilian government did not amount to a peaceful settlement and though there was a decrease in active fighting, this was potentially due to reorganisation of former government fighters rather than an actual cessation. In fact, some elements loyal to the previous government refused to hand over weapons or settle their status. Clashes between the interim government's forces and groups loyal to former senior commanders occurred, notably in December 2024 and January 2025. In this view the previously established armed conflict continued as former government forces regrouped and attempted to launch an offensive that began in March 2025.

Yet another view is that the prior conflict may have ended in December-January, but that the violence in March was of such intensity and the groups opposing the government were sufficiently organised that it would have amounted to a new non-international armed conflict. In this view, it should be noted that the criteria relied upon by international tribunals to establish whether a conflict meets the threshold of intensity for the application of international humanitarian law were largely met even in isolation from any preexisting conflict.[103] On 6 March, during an arrest operation by interim government forces, pro-former government armed groups attacked interim government forces in the Latakia countryside. Dozens of attacks by pro-former government armed groups occurred over the next few hours across Latakia and Tartus governorates, with such groups cutting off highways between these governorates and controlling specific areas. Interim government military units were surrounded by forces loyal to the previous government and strategic locations in Latakia and other locations were also seized, with reinforcements and ammunition depots organised. Until this point, the interim government primarily relied upon the General Security forces, operated essentially as police forces. As those forces were initially overwhelmed, the interim authorities responded with a general mobilization and a large-scale deployment of military factions and a general *en masse* call for mobilisation that same evening, reportedly involving thousands of government forces and private individuals. Heavy weapons, including helicopters dropping improvised bombs, were employed by interim government forces. Mortars and other explosive weapons were also reportedly used by both interim government forces and PFGF. Once reinforcements arrived, in some locations following more than 24 hours of fighting, PFGF withdrew from their positions in the cities and towns and retreated. As a result of the fighting, hundreds of interim government force members were killed, with

[102] See for instance, International Criminal Court, *Hassan* Trial judgment, ICC-01/12-01/18, 26 June 2024, para 1267.

[103] 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.

an unknown number of casualties among PFGF fighters. Interim government forces under the command of the Ministry of Defence, accompanied in many cases by General Security as well as private individuals, then sought out pro-former government armed group members that retreated into the countryside and rural villages beginning on 7 March. Most of the killings and instances of torture and ill-treatment took place on the 7th. On 10 March the interim government announced the end of security operations in the coastal areas, though sporadic clashes continued through 14 March.

Similarly, the organisational criteria for the pro-former government armed groups as set out in various judgments were arguably satisfied as well.[104] According to the interim government, the attacks were well-organised and planned by pro-former government armed groups, involving at least 4,000 fighters. The Commission's military analysis indicates that there are a number of pro-former government armed groups that conducted coordinated attacks on interim government forces, though they lack a cohesive command and control structure and are not organised in a hierarchical manner between the groups. The groups are led by former senior commanders of formal armed forces, but the degree to which the fighters they assembled have an organised structure that is capable of following orders or imposing internal group discipline is not yet clear. The scale and speed or organisation once clashes began on 6 March provide some indicia that orders were indeed followed, at least for a short period of time, and that the groups were able to communicate and organise simultaneous operations across a wide geographic area in at least two governorates. Multiple individuals claiming to be the leaders of such groups have publicly stated that they were the commanders of specific pro-former government armed groups and sought to topple the interim government.

The component units of the former government's forces do not appear to have maintained their prior structure or names as they were prior to the collapse of the former government. As observed in many prior commission reports, however, the former government often deployed mixed composition formations comprising elements from multiple military and intelligence forces.[105] The composition of the new groups may reflect those preexisting dynamics. Regardless of the precise internal organizational structures of the groups at this time, their organizational capabilities were evident from the coordinated operations launched on 6 March.

Based on the above, it is reasonable to conclude that the opposing sides viewed these events as an armed conflict, whether as a continuation of the post-2011-armed conflict or as a new armed conflict. Notwithstanding this assessment, the commission notes that it would also be reasonable to come to a different conclusion depending on subsequent developments and the establishment of further facts. The conclusion above however appears to be the most reasonable in light of the circumstances prevailing at the time of writing.

C. International criminal law

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

[104] 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].

[105] See for example, A/HRC/19/69, para. 94.

Geneva Conventions of 1949, Second Hague Protocol for the Protection of Cultural Property of 1999, and Additional Protocol I remain applicable.

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.

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.[106] 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*.

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.[107]

[106] See A/HRC/21/50, annex II.
[107] See A/HRC/52/69, para 2.

Annex IV – Correspondence with the Interim Government

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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/15/2025

Excellency, 19 May 2025

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.

In line with our mandate, and as mentioned when we last met, the Commission is currently investigating the violent events of early March 2025 in Latakia, Tartous, Homs and Hama governorates, and similar events that occurred before and after that period, in preparation for our briefing to the upcoming fifty-ninth session of the UN Human Rights Council next month.

In this context, we are planning to send a working-level delegation to Syria this month to meet local law enforcement representatives, community leaders and members of civil society in Damascus, Latakia and Tartous, and recently sought visas through your Ministry for this purpose. Through this mission, we will be seeking information regarding topics set out in Annex I and II to this letter.

Mindful that national investigations are still ongoing and that not all information requested may be readily available at this stage, we remain ready to discuss the most appropriate means by which to obtain the above information. We also recognize that the Ministry has limited capacity at the moment and therefore the Commission would be pleased to receive information either in writing and/or meetings with the upcoming working-level mission to Syria.

Should the Ministry choose to reply in writing, we kindly request that any inputs be received by 5 June 2025, for the information to be processed ahead of the Human Rights Council's June session.

Regardless of the manner of reply, the most useful forms of assistance 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, maps and other relevant documentation that could be shared with the Commission.

Kindly note that we will send you a further request for information in due course regarding other incidents under investigation occurring between 28 November and 30 June 2025, which may have entailed violations attributed to a variety of parties, including the Israeli Defence Forces.

We would also like to take this opportunity to note our concern regarding the troubling information recently emerging concerning abductions and disappearances in recent months, in particular of women. We urge your government to take action to prevent any further abductions, promptly investigate those that occurred to hold perpetrators accountable, and to ensure that families are kept informed of the authorities' progress in this regard.

For any questions regarding the details of this request or opportunities to collaborate, please contact the Secretariat, at ohchr-coisyria@un.org. We look forward to our next 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

Annex I

Contextual information concerning the violent events in early March in Latakia, Tartus, Hama, and Homs governorates

The Commission would be grateful for information from the interim authorities concerning the overall context before, during, and after the period of violence and in particular concerning events between 4 and 12 March, as set out below.

1. We understand that there were a series of clashes between the interim government's General Security and armed groups and individuals, including allegedly remnants of the former government's security forces. We would appreciate information regarding the locations and timings of clashes and attacks as well as specific incidents in which civilians and interim government General Security personnel, including those who had laid down their arms, were killed and injured. We would be grateful for information on how many interim government forces members were killed or injured. We would also be grateful for information on how many individuals allegedly fighting against the government were killed during clashes.

2. We would be grateful for information regarding the number of General Security personnel and other interim government' forces deployed in Latakia, Tartous and Hama before, during and after these events. Regarding the reported general call for mobilization, issued on 6 March on the Military Operations Department Channel on Telegram, the Commission would be interested in further information on the purpose of the mobilization and whether it was directed at specific units or factions of the interim authorities' security forces or was a more general call. We also seek information, should it be available, regarding the number of security force personnel and civilians who responded to the call, and which armed factions affiliated with the authorities subsequently deployed to the coastal areas.

3. The Commission notes the Ministry of Interior's statement on 6 March stressing the importance of protecting civilians and property and acting within the law. The Commission would be grateful for information regarding additional such official statements, orders and communications made by the interim authorities, whether by Ministry of Interior or Ministry of Defence, to security forces and factions affiliated with the interim authorities between 6 and 10 March with the aim of protecting civilians. We would also appreciate information regarding whether the operation was deemed a law enforcement or a military operation, or a combination thereof.

4. We understand the Ministry of Defence issued orders to the factions regarding the location of where they should deploy. We would be interested in receiving information regarding which factions were deployed in which locations between 6 and 10 March, and the content of the operational orders issued by the Ministry of Defence. We would also appreciate information concerning which factions complied with orders as directed and which did not, and what actions the Ministry of Defence undertook to ensure compliance, in particular after credible information concerning alleged unlawful killing or injuring of unarmed civilians emerged.

5. We are investigating allegations that civilians were killed and injured in numerous locations between 6 and 10 March in a series of incidents listed further below in Annex II. We have also received information that individual members of General Security, factions affiliated with the interim authorities and others looted or pillaged property of civilians in some of these locations. We would be grateful for any additional information you may wish to share regarding the sequence of events in these locations.

6. Concerning the establishment of a national inquiry to investigate these allegations as an important step towards accountability, truth and justice, we have welcomed this initiative and appreciated our fruitful meeting with its members in Damascus last March. In addition, we have also received information that the interim authorities have arrested several alleged perpetrators, including civilians, in this regard. We would be grateful for further information on this latter point, including

the number of individuals associated with the former government forces, with factions affiliated with the interim authorities' forces or other individuals currently in custody and under investigation for crimes committed against civilians in the context of the events in Latakia, Tartous and Hama, between 4 and 12 March; 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 forces or commanders in relation to these events, such as formal reprimands, dismissals, transfers, or relief of command.

7. We have received reports that families of civilians killed in the coastal areas in March were prevented from burying them in accordance with religious and cultural practices in their home villages by General Security, and that some families have not yet been able to receive death certificates for their deceased family members. We would appreciate any information that may be available in this regard.

8. We have also received reports of numerous abductions of Alawite women, including from Damascus, Rural Damascus, Homs, Hama, Latakia and Tartous governorates. We would be grateful for any information that the interim authorities may have regarding these alleged abductions 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.

9. Finally, the Commission is also investigating allegations of human rights violations committed in the context of combing operations since January 2025, including in Hama, Homs and Damascus (see specific incidents listed in the below in Annex II) for which we would be grateful for any information the interim authorities are able to provide.

***

Annex II

Alleged incidents in Damascus, Hama, Latakia and Tartous Governorates, 27 January – 8 March 2025

The Commission has received credible information regarding the killing and injury of civilians regarding the incidents below, which are all currently under investigation. The Commission would welcome any information deemed pertinent to share regarding each event listed below. 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 on these incidents, subject to the informed consent of the sources and in line with standard practices, through its focal point within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

- On 27 January 2025, civilians were allegedly killed in Anz village, Hama Governorate.
- On 31 January 2025, civilians were allegedly killed in Arzah village, Hama Governorate.
- On 26 February 2025, alleged injury of civilians during a security operation in Qardaha, Latakia Governorate.
- On 26 February 2025, alleged killing of civilians during security operation in Ain Shams, Latakia Governorate.
- On 3 March 2025, alleged killing of civilians in Latakia city in the context of a security operation, Latakia Governorate.
- On 6 or 7 March 2025, alleged killing and injury of civilians and looting and destruction of property in Latakia city, Latakia Governorate.
- Between 6 and 8 March, alleged killing and injury of civilians and looting and destruction of property on the Latakia-Tartous Highway.
- Between 6 and 9 March 2025, alleged damage to medical facilities and a blood bank in Jableh, Baniays, Tartous and Latakia, and subsequent disruption of medical services for several days.
- On 7 March 2025, alleged killing and injury of civilians and looting and destruction of property in Snowbar village, Jableh, Latakia Governorate.
- On 7 March 2025, alleged killing and injury of civilians and looting and destruction of property in Jableh city, Latakia Governorate.
- On 7 March 2025, alleged killing and injury of civilians and looting and destruction of property in Al Mukhtaria village, Latakia Governorate.
- On 7 March 2025, alleged killing and injury of civilians and looting and destruction of property in Al Shir village, Latakia Governorate.
- On 7 March 2025, alleged killing and injury of civilians and looting and destruction of property in Ain Al-Arous, Al Qardaha, Latakia Governorate.
- On 7 March 2025, alleged killing and injury of civilians and looting and destruction of property in Al Haffa village, Latakia Governorate.
- On 7 March 2025, alleged killing and injury of civilians and looting and destruction of property in Arzah village, Hama Governorate.
- On 7 March 2025, alleged killing and injury of civilians and looting and destruction of property in Salhab, Hama Governorate.
- On 7 March 2025, alleged killing and injury of civilians and looting and destruction of property in Thwyeim village, Hama Governorate.
- On 7 March 2025, alleged killing and injury of civilians and looting and destruction of property in Al-Rasafa, Massiaf, Hama Governorate.
- On 7 March 2025, alleged killing and injury of civilians and looting and destruction of property in Baniyas, Tartous Governorate.
- On 7 March 2025, alleged killing and injury of civilians in Al-Qadam neighbourhood, Damascus Governorate.
- On 8 March 2025, alleged killing and injury of civilians and looting and destruction of property in Barmaya village, Latakia Governorate.
- On 8 March 2025, alleged killing and injury of civilians and looting and destruction of property in Hattaniyeh village, Hama Governorate.

Alleged incidents in Homs Governorate, 14 January – 8 March 2025

- Between 14 January and 7 March 2025, alleged arbitrary arrest, ill-treatment and torture of civilians in the context of combing operations in Tasneen and Al-Hamam, Al-Ghozaylah, Al-Gharbiyah, Al-Kanisah, Tarin, and Kafrnan, Mukharam and Wadi Al Zahab villages in Homs Governorate.

- On 21 January 2025, alleged killing of civilians in the context of combing operations in Ghawr Gharbiyah village, north-western Homs countryside.
- Between 22 and 30 January 2025, alleged arrest, ill-treatment and torture of civilians in the context of combing operations in Homs city and Kanisa village in western rural Homs.
- On 23 January 2025, alleged killing, arbitrary arrest, torture and ill-treatment of civilians in Fahil and Maryameen villages, Homs Governorate.

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Established pursuant to United Nations 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/25/2025

25 July 2025

Excellency,

I write to share with you an advance copy of the UN Commission of Inquiry's full draft report on violations against civilians in coastal and western central Syria, January-March 2025, in Arabic and English. Most of the attached text was shared previously with you for onwards sharing with the National Inquiry on 6 July, to aid the inquiry members in their important mandate. We were very pleased to learn that the National Inquiry has now completed their work and delivered their report to the President on 13 July.

I also wish to express our gratitude for the fruitful meeting we had in March, and for your ongoing support and facilitation of our work in Syria, and in particular our mission to the coastal areas last month.

The full draft report contains our findings regarding serious violations of human rights, primarily targeting Alawi communities, including a series of massacres that occurred in early March 2025 in Latakia, Tartus and Hama Governorates. The Commission found that violations, including acts that likely amount to crimes, including war crimes, were perpetrated by pro-former government fighters, interim government forces members and private individuals. These acts included murder, torture, abductions, and inhumane acts related to the treatment of the dead, as well as pillage and property destruction, including related to medical facilities.

As is the usual practice for UN Commissions of Inquiry we would appreciate receiving comments on any factual errors or inaccuracies that the Government may wish to submit regarding this report. We would respectfully request that any comments be submitted within one week and no later than 1 August 2025. We envisage to publish the report during the first half of August 2025.

We are deeply concerned that the recent violence during the coastal events, and more recently in Suweyda, has exacerbated divisions between communities and fostered a climate of fear among many Syrians. Serious human rights violations continue amid heightened insecurity, with ongoing reports of killings, abductions, looting and displacement.

We acknowledge the interim authorities' commitment to accountability, including their response to the March events, the findings of the National Inquiry, and the recent announcement of investigations into alleged human rights violations in Suweyda. Impunity for serious crimes and human rights violations was a defining feature of Syria under President Assad. Holding perpetrators accountable - regardless of affiliation or rank - through criminal trials that comply with international human rights standards, alongside efforts to ensure non-repetition, initiate reparations, and rebuild trust among affected

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

communities, including through the recently established national bodies on Transitional Justice and the Missing, would mark a clear departure from the past. This would signal the interim authorities' active commitment to protecting the rights of all Syrians, irrespective of political affiliation, ethnic origin, religion, or gender.

The Commission also made a number of recommendations in the draft report for the interim authorities' consideration, which are aimed at tackling the climate of fear and heightened insecurity while seeking to enhance protection for civilians and assure against repetition of past and recent abuses. These include ensuring those suspected of involvement in crimes described in this report, and in the report of the national inquiry, are immediately suspended from further duties while investigations continue. Establishing dedicated communications offices within key Ministries with regular briefings to the public would assist in filling the information gaps that exists at present. Enhancing the work of and expanding the locations of the newly established complaints office would also be helpful to address community grievances. Striving for a more diverse security force composition by recruiting from all communities and considering a hybrid composition of forces at all checkpoints and visible localities would also assist in rebuilding trust and may reduce violations. Last, taking urgent and continuing concrete measures to expand screening processes to ensure that known or suspected perpetrators of grave violations in the past are not recruited into the ranks of the interim government security forces, and to ensure full compliance with their exclusion would be a welcome step.

In addition to seeking your views on these proposals, we would be very interested in discussing these, and how we may support, with you in-person next time we meet.

Once again, I wish to thank you for the excellent cooperation. We remain committed to ensuring the protection of human rights and to promote a future of dignity, safety, and justice for all people in Syria.

The Commission avails itself of this opportunity to renew to your Excellency the assurances of its highest consideration

Sincerely,

Paulo Sergio Pinheiro
Chair
Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the
Syrian Arab Republic

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

Syrian Arab Republic
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
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الجمهورية العربية السورية
وزارة الخارجية والمغتربين

Formal Letter

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates
Syrian Arab Republic
Damascus

Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro
Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic
Geneva, Switzerland

Date: 8 August 2025

Subject: Response to the Commission's Most Recent Report

Your Excellency Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro,

I thank you for your letter addressed to me and trust that you have been well since we had the pleasure of welcoming you and your delegation in Damascus.

I look forward to meeting you again and continuing our constructive cooperation.

As you know—and as both the Syrian and international communities will remember—the new Syrian government took the extraordinary and historic step of not objecting to the renewal of the Commission of Inquiry's mandate at the Human Rights Council, a mandate that the former regime consistently opposed. This led, for the first time in modern Syrian history, to the unanimous adoption of the resolution, reflecting our commitment to transparency, accountability and constructive engagement with the international community.

We deeply appreciate the efforts reflected in your latest report, and take particular pride in the Commission's acknowledgment of the unprecedented and unrestricted access granted to your investigative team in March to the coastal areas affected by violence—access never before afforded to an international body in contemporary Syrian history.

We take serious note of the alleged violations committed during that period reflected in your report, which appear to be consistent with the findings summarised in the report by the Independent National Commission, who were appointed by the His Excellency President Ahmed Al-Sharaa days after the violent events in March. That report was made public in July and subjected to media scrutiny in a transparent press conference—also an unprecedented step in Syria. As you noted, these allegations remain under formal investigation, and a number of individuals have been detained as a result. This alignment underscores the importance of our efforts in building credible national institutions that gain

the public trust, institutions that the Assad regime systematically dismantled, discredited and exploited as instruments to entrench its rule for 54 years.

In this regard, we welcome your report's reference to the measures we have taken towards accountability, in line with our international obligations as a sovereign state. These efforts reflect our determination to build institutions rooted in justice and the rule of law, after inheriting them in a state of collapse and corruption from the Assad regime.

We also welcome the continued cooperation over recent months between your Commission and the Independent National Commission, which has allowed our national body to benefit from international expertise in its difficult mission and to provide you with essential contextual explanations. This cooperation reflects the spirit of partnership the new Syria seeks to foster, while maintaining the independence of both institutions, a principle of paramount importance to the Syrian state.

We are pleased that you confirmed in your report the extent of the disinformation spread via social media during the March attacks, which significantly hindered our and the international community's ability to identify actual crimes and address them appropriately. Your acknowledgment of this challenge is an important step towards ensuring that future responses are based on documented facts rather than fabricated narratives.

We also value the report's recognition of the positive measures taken by the government at the highest levels, as well as the initiatives by members of our forces to halt violations and restore calm. These efforts reflect the Syrian government's commitment and responsibility to safeguarding and protecting all citizens.

We welcome your conclusion that there is no evidence of any government policy or directive to commit these crimes. On the contrary, you noted the issuance of clear orders to prevent violations and restore order. This conclusion stands in stark contrast to the premature findings of some human rights organisations and media outlets, which undermined investigations and contributed to either deliberate or inadvertent misinformation.

We further appreciate the report's framing of its findings within the broader context of the challenges facing Syria today: the legacy of mass atrocities committed by the former regime, the dilapidated judicial system we inherited, the attacks carried out by remnant Assad forces involving grave violations, and the immense difficulties of reforming the security and military sectors. The inclusion of these elements demonstrates a balanced and responsible approach, as well as a logical sequence of events.

We take note of your detailed recommendations and trust that they, together with those of the Independent National Commission, will serve as a roadmap for Syria's continued progress — within our capabilities and despite both internal and external challenges. As you observed, they call for expanding ongoing efforts and initiating additional measures to entrench justice, ensure accountability and prevent the recurrence of violations.

We further note with interest that your first recommendation to the international community is to support our government in implementing the remaining recommendations and in lifting any remaining sanctions.

In conclusion, we reaffirm our commitment to constructive cooperation with your office and with the wider international community. We are confident that our future cooperation will remain grounded in mutual respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

May mercy be upon the martyrs of these events, condolences and patience to their families and strength to all of us in the pursuit of justice.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Minster of foreign Affairs
and Expatriates

Asaad Hasan Al-Shaibani