



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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**Human rights situations that require the Council's attention**

### **Written statement\* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[04 August 2025]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

## The Plight of Christians in Syria

The ECLJ wishes to highlight the plight of Christians in Syria. Numbering around 2 million before the 2011 Arab Spring, the Christian population had fallen to 500,000 by the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024. Since then, the accelerating exodus has raised serious concerns about the potential disappearance of the Christian presence in Syria unless urgent and concrete protective measures are implemented. This assessment is based on direct testimonies from two senior Syrian church leaders, two Christian civil society representatives, and a foreign academic specializing in Syrian affairs.

### 1. Collapse of Security for Religious Minority Communities

#### 1.1. Targeted Attacks and Violence Against Christians

On 22 June 2025, an Islamist terrorist attacked the Greek Orthodox Mar Elias Church in Damascus during Sunday Mass. The bombing killed 25 Christians and injured 63, “martyrs both of the faith and of the nation,” according to Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch John X. No government official attended the site of the attack, apart from Christian minister Hind Kabawat. Patriarch John X publicly addressed Syria’s self-proclaimed new president, Ahmed al-Charaa, declaring: “The government bears full responsibility.”

On 13 July 2025, a car bomb attack targeting the Mar Elias Maronite Church in Al-Kharibat, near Tartous, was foiled thanks to a joint ambush carried out by local security forces and village residents. They intercepted a vehicle loaded with explosives, weapons, and incendiary materials.

Across our interviews, a recurring theme emerged: a profound sense of abandonment by Western governments, especially France, historically seen as a protector of Eastern Christians. “If I ask Christians what they want today,” lamented one senior church leader, “they will all say: to leave Syria. They are afraid for their children’s future, and of the specific violence targeting women.”

The Damascus bombing only deepened Christian mistrust of the new authorities’ promises of protection. Christians are not alone, however, in facing the collapse of public order. According to the academic interviewed, “Today, Charaa is knowingly allowing the Alawites and Druze to be massacred. Tomorrow it will be the Kurds, and then the various Sunni factions will end up fighting each other to the death.” “Although the new leadership has adopted moderate rhetoric since taking power, their forces on the ground have remained staunchly Islamist and extremist,” explained a Christian civil society leader.

#### 1.2. Massacres of Alawites and Druzes

In March 2025, violent clashes in the coastal provinces of Latakia and Tartous between Assad loyalists and transitional forces left over 1,400 deaths, nearly three-quarters of whom were civilians from the Alawite minority, a Shiite branch of Islam to which the former president belonged.

In July 2025, new violence erupted in Sweida between Druze groups and Sunni Bedouin clans. The intervention of government forces did not ease tensions; on the contrary, they openly supported the Bedouins. “We saw the real Syria: tribal bands calling for jihad against the Druzes, entering Sweida to massacre, loot, then drive away with refrigerators, dishwashers, everything they had managed to steal, in the back of their vehicles. In some cases, women were also abducted, not necessarily to be used as sex slaves like during the Daesh era, but to be ransomed,” explained the professor.

Israel, concerned for its border security and in an effort to protect the Druze population, intervened militarily. The death toll from these clashes exceeds 1,000, including Pastor Khaled Mezher, an evangelical of Druze origin, and his family, as well as Hosam Saraya, a

35-year-old American citizen of Syrian descent. The Greek Melkite church of Saint Michael in the village of Al-Sura was burned down, and dozens of Christian homes were looted and set on fire.

## 2. Religious Minority Communities Facing Marginalization and Islamization

### 2.1. Exile as a Means of Survival

“Syrian society is in a state of disintegration due to years of war, displacement, and exile. Over half the population (13 million) is now either internally displaced or has become refugees abroad,” lamented a senior church leader. Properties abandoned by Christian, Alawite, or Druze families, either recently massacred or driven into exile, have been reassigned to regime loyalists or sold to developers linked to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), as part of an informal but systematic policy of clientelist redistribution.

Minority communities are subjected to summary executions or abductions for ransom. “The recent massacres, though isolated, serve as a precedent: one can no longer carry out a genocide like that of the Armenians by Turkey in 1915. Instead, a few well-targeted massacres are permitted, shocking enough to send a deterrent message to the rest of the community. Added to that are the daily vexations and countless restrictions that make life unbearable, ultimately pushing people to leave on their own,” summarized the professor.

### 2.2. National Expansion of the Islamist Model from Idlib

Known for his jihadist past, interim president Ahmed al-Charaa now adopts a superficially inclusive discourse to gain Western acceptance. In practice, he seeks to extend nationwide the Islamist model enforced in Idlib by his group HTS since 2017. This system features centralized rule, strict sharia enforcement, a deregulated economy controlled by loyal networks, and minimal tolerance for minorities, who serve only as symbolic tokens of diversity. Syria risks becoming an Islamic republic in all but name, erasing its pluralistic heritage.

Marginalization affects all non-Arab Sunnis: Christians, Alawites, Druze, and Kurds. At universities, men must grow beards. In the civil service, Alawites have been purged and replaced by Idlibis, even in port management. “We are forced to teach sharia law in our Christian schools, to hire principals with degrees in Islamic law, and to enforce gender segregation, in direct contradiction with the Syrian Christian educational tradition. It is unacceptable,” said a local bishop.

Social control invades private life: religious police confiscate alcohol, close liquor shops, and demand proof of kinship for men seen with women. Veiling is strongly promoted, Western dress is restricted, and pressure to convert to Sunni Islam grows, through street preachers and widespread distribution of abayas.

## 3. Political, Judicial and Economic Lockdown

### 3.1. Monopolization of Power

This strategy of Islamization goes hand in hand with systemic political exclusion. Of the 23 ministers appointed in the government formed on 23 March 2025, 9 come from the HTS group. The first Minister of Justice, Shadi al-Waisi, previously served as a judge for the al-Nusra Front, historically allied with HTS. Footage from January 2015 shows him overseeing the public execution of two women accused of “prostitution and corruption,” shot in the head following a summary trial.

The parliament scheduled for September 2025 will in fact be nothing more than an appointed body: 70 members will be directly designated by the president, and the remaining 140 by a committee under his control. This concentration of power is rooted in the constitutional declaration signed by Ahmed al-Charaa on 13 March 2025, which grants five

years before the adoption of a final constitution. Kurdish representatives denounce the absence of any meaningful recognition of the ethnic and religious “diversity” of the Syrian people.

### 3.2. Selective Justice and Absence of Reconciliation

Several senior Assad-era officials have been arrested, such as General Mohammed Kanjo Hassan, accused of mass executions in Sednaya, and intelligence officer Saleh Mohammad al-Basis. Yet no similar investigations have targeted HTS figures now in power. A commission into the March 2025 Alawite massacres led only to the arrest of a few low-level perpetrators, with no accountability for higher-ups. “Armed groups are seeking to exact justice themselves, without waiting for the implementation of a so-called transitional justice. What we are witnessing is revenge, not reconciliation,” observed a Christian civil society leader. This selective justice, silent on crimes by the new Islamist authorities, fuels impunity and sectarianism, and discredits hopes for a democratic transition.

### 3.3. Economic Predation

Over 90% of Syrians live below the poverty line. “The Syrian people suffer from repeated crises in food, medicine, electricity, and water, while the consequences of international economic sanctions continue to affect daily life and economic growth, despite the recent decision to lift them,” lamented a senior church figure.

Beneath the appearance of economic recovery, Ahmed al-Charaa’s Syria has established an opaque predatory system reminiscent of the Assad regime. According to a Christian civil society representative, “it’s as if the secular Baathist party has simply grown an Islamist beard.” The country’s economic restructuring is led by Hazem al-Charaa, the president’s brother, and by a secret committee composed of former HTS officials, some of whom are under international sanctions for financing terrorism. This committee, operating without any public mandate, has already recovered more than \$1.6 billion in assets, mainly by negotiating confidential deals with oligarchs from the former regime in exchange for immunity.

## 4. Recommendations

The ECLJ calls on the Member States of the Human Rights Council to:

- Officially recognize Syrian Christians as an at-risk group.
- Mandate an impartial international investigation into the recent massacres.
- Demand the immediate implementation of a pluralistic and inclusive constitutional process.
- Encourage local governance to ensure the protection of minorities.
- Reinforce individual sanctions against those responsible for human rights violations.