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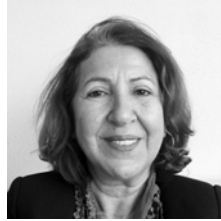
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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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31.03.2025



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Alawites and Christians: Behind Syria's silent, sectarian slaughter

Syria's new HTS rulers have unleashed a campaign of sectarian retribution against Alawite and Christian communities – an unfolding genocide met not with outrage, but with diplomatic overtures to the rebranded Al-Qaeda warlords now ruling from Damascus.



Photo Credit: The Cradle

The massacres and repression of Alawites and Christians in Syria began immediately after the fall of Damascus and have continued for the past three and a half months.

On 7 December 2024, the day after the capital city fell to Idlib-based militants, Israel began bombing Syrian territory and deployed tanks into the country's south.

Yet the barrels of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and its affiliated Salafi extremist groups – who had taken control of Damascus – were not pointed at Israel, but at Syria's Alawite population. What began as attacks on Alawite and Christian religious sites quickly turned into the systematic [slaughter of Alawites](#).

A campaign of ethnic cleansing

HTS-affiliated militants, now integrated into Syria's security forces, raided Alawite towns and villages, humiliating residents, looting homes, arresting men, and executing them in the streets. Videos they filmed show them dragging detainees across the ground, forcing them to bark like dogs, and celebrating scenes of public degradation and death.

From the outset, it was clear that these Salafi extremist factions, driven by hatred and vengeance, intended to carry out ethnic cleansing. Their campaign was not spontaneous – it was the result of 14 years of sectarian incitement.

The [fall of Damascus](#) was sudden, and the shock of it has triggered widespread fears of genocide against minorities. Over a decade ago, since the onset of the Syrian crisis in 2011, Alawites have been marked for extermination: tens of thousands of foreign militants, drawn by the call to “jihad” against the government of ousted president Bashar al-Assad – an Alawite – entered Syria chanting [slogans](#) such as, “Alawites to the grave, Christians to Beirut!”

Fatwas soon proliferated that decreed the blood, property, and women of Christians, Druze, and Alawites to be ‘halal.’ In the first major massacre in Jisr al-Shughur in 2011, 120 Syrian police officers were executed and thrown into the Orontes River (Nahr al-Asi).

Entire populations were displaced from areas such as Al-Mukharram Alfuqaney, with over 34,000 residents expelled and more than 300,000 families from Idlib resettled in their homes. Around this time, the extremely sectarian Sheikh Adnan al-Arur speaking from Riyadh on the Al-Wisal TV channel, [explicitly called for](#) the extermination of Alawites, “O Alawites, by Allah, we will mince you and feed you to the dogs.” He urged, “Wage jihad, and Allah will reward you with the land and women of the Alawites.”

Similarly, Salafi cleric Yassin al-Ajlouni issued a fatwa declaring, “Take Alawite and Druze women – but it is forbidden to marry them. Use them as you wish, without marriage.” This incitement soon spread among Salafi clerics across the Arab world, leading to mass killings and other atrocities.

One of the most notorious occurred in [Latakia in 2013](#), when 190 Alawites, including 57 women and 18 children, were killed overnight. Other massacres followed across Hama, Homs, Latakia, Tartous, and eastern Ghouta – each claiming the lives of at least 100 people, typically during clashes between the Syrian army and the Islamist extremist forces.

Today, however, there are no longer such clashes – only HTS and its affiliated groups turning their guns on defenceless Alawite civilians.

From isolated massacres to systematic purge

The recent attacks have escalated into full-scale genocide due to two key factors: a near-total media blackout, and the consistent false portrayal of the atrocities as isolated acts of revenge, unrelated to HTS. During the first month of what was widely described as “individual incidents,” Alawite sheikhs, judges, academics, and farmers were specifically targeted.

Despite claims that the violence was sporadic and reactionary, their documentation tells a different story – one of systematic attacks on religious sanctities, mass arrests, looting, forced displacement, and destruction of homes.

All were catalogued by the [Syrian National Violations Documentation Center](#), which published photos and videos on Facebook before the page was removed by Meta in an apparent censorship effort. The group continues to share content via WhatsApp despite ongoing attempts to suppress its work.

Desecration, executions, and forced expulsions

A few illustrative examples among the many repeated violations across Alawite and Christian communities include the destruction of graves and shrines, desecration of churches, attacks on worshippers, the burning of the Christmas tree in Hama, and the torching of the tomb of Abu Abdallah al-Khasibi.

Between 8 and 25 December alone, the Salafi extremist groups attacked churches, raided Christian villages, fired on religious symbols, and killed shrine caretakers. The following short list of verified incidents illustrates just how systematic and frequent these attacks were:

- 19 December 2024: Shots were fired at the Greek Orthodox church in the city of Hama. Bishop Nicholas Baalbaki, the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Hama, said, “Armed groups of people came, pointed their guns at us, broke crosses, scanned the walls of the church and left.”
- 22 December 2024: In the Syrian village of Safsafa, properties of Alawites and Christians were raided, money was extorted, and their women were subjected to violence.

- 23 December 2024: Islamist extremist groups affiliated with HTS burn the Christmas Tree in Hama. Shots were fired at Christian youths who tried to prevent the burning of the tree.
- 24 December 2024: The mausoleum of the Alawites in the village of Barouha, near the city of Talkalakh in Homs, was attacked by Islamist extremist groups. His tomb was burned, his belongings stolen and destroyed.
- 25 December 2024: Militants set fire to the 700-year-old tomb of Abu Abdallah al-Khasibi, an important scholar of the Arab Alawite community, and five Alawite civilians who were caring for the shrine were massacred. Armed militants stepped on the dead bodies and posed for photographs.
- 5 January 2025: In Damascus's Christian quarter of Al-Kasa, a Salafi extremist militant on horseback carrying an ISIS flag paraded through the neighborhood in the Burj al-Rus square. In addition, an announcement was made in the Christian quarter to call for the hijab, and men and women were instructed not to walk together.
- 15 January 2025: The private Christian Al-Hawash University in Homs was raided, and Salafi Islamist beliefs were imposed on everyone at the institution.
- 15 January 2025: In Damascus's Christian Al-Qasda neighborhood, a carload of armed Islamist extremist militants from Ghouta, wearing masks, attempted to distribute leaflets enforcing the wearing of the niqab and calling for a ban on smoking. When Christian youths intervened, the militants fired into the air to intimidate the crowds, and a brawl ensued.
- 16 January 2025: The Greek Orthodox church in Hama was attacked again, and the door of the church was destroyed.
- 15 February 2025: Christian villages in Wadi al-Nasara (Valley of the Christians) were raided, and 12 Christian youths were kidnapped. Three were later released, and nine were held hostage – the reason being the ringing of church bells.
- 17 February 2025: In Homs's Zaydal village, Salafi extremist groups attacked the Christian cemetery, destroying crosses and some Christian religious symbols.

Alawite and Christian communities alike faced mass arrests, violent home invasions, forced evacuations, and large-scale looting. Villages like Kafr Nan, Cobbarin, Talbiseh, and Talkalakh were subjected to artillery shelling, property theft, and public executions.

On 11 January, Syrian opposition leader George Barshini [declared](#) HTS was conducting a systematic genocide, stating that thousands of Alawite men had been detained across 40 prisons, with long-term plans for their extermination.

Disappearances, morgues, and mass graves

On 2 January, in the village of Al-Ghawr, two HTS convoys arrived at dawn, opened fire indiscriminately, stormed the school, intimidated students, wounded many, and executed residents in the streets. Elderly Ahmad Mari Jardo was killed while fleeing, and four young men were gunned down trying to protect him. Corpses were left to rot, families were denied the right to bury their dead, and looting continued unchallenged.

On 5 January, 34,000 people were displaced from the Alawite area of Al-Mukharram Alfuqaneyin Homs. Across Homs, the Alawite population is rapidly being liquidated. Over 300,000 families, most of them foreigners, are brought in from Idlib and settled in the homes of Alawites.

A resident of Hama's Matnin village reported on 12 January that “All the houses in the western neighborhood (Alawite quarter) were robbed and burned, all their property was stolen, people were expelled from the village, they were threatened with death and execution if they returned to the village.”

On January 16, in the village of Cabborin, Homs, heavy weapon fire targeted residential homes starting at 8:00 AM and continued until 5:00 PM. Later, the extremist militants conducted random raids, searches, and arrests, detaining dozens of people – mostly civilians – who were rounded up and taken to the Orontes River (Nahr al-Asi).

Additionally, many villagers, including those over the age of 60, were beaten and tortured for over an hour. They were subjected to sectarian abuse, insults, and humiliation, while being effectively trapped under siege, unable to leave the area.

On 17 January, at least 300 people from Homs-Cobbarin, Talbiseh and the Kurdish village of Dasnieh were arrested and taken “to the bed of the Orontes River, where they executed all of them.”

On 24 January, Homs-based journalist Wahid Yazbek [reported](#) on numerous murders from hospital morgues:

“There are dozens of unidentified bodies in hospitals in Homs. At Al-Walid Hospital, 23 unidentified bodies were found. There are 102 bodies in the Grand Forensic Center in Al-Waer and the Karm al-Loz hospital. Most of them have their faces disfigured.”

Journalist Nidal Hamade [observed](#):

“Homs hospitals are still receiving the bodies of dozens of people coming from the prisons of Homs and Hama, all of whom died under torture and were then shot with a mercy bullet in the head. The majority of the bodies belong to soldiers and officers who

disappeared in the first days after the fall of the regime. They are now being liquidated.”

On 31 January, in Arza village in Hama, all Alawite men were executed by the Orontes riverbed. Similar executions occurred in Homs, with at least nine killed and many abducted. The massacre in Fahel, where 58 residents were killed and a young girl died of shock next to her father’s corpse, was the first [acknowledged](#) by the HTS governor of Homs. Other massacres had either been denied or blamed on rogue actors.

Following the collapse of Damascus, over 30,000 Syrian soldiers surrendered but have since vanished. Families held protests, demanding answers, while reports emerged of hundreds of unidentified bodies found in hospital morgues. Many showed signs of torture and execution. Journalists confirmed the corpses were mostly soldiers who disappeared in the early days of HTS’s takeover.

These stories represent only a select recounting of *verified* violent events carried out against Syrian minorities – especially Alawites and Christians – since the overthrow of Assad's government.

The fate of women

Between December 2024 and today, [dozens](#) of women have been targeted for kidnappings. Some were later found murdered and mutilated, including [Professor Rasha al-Ali](#) from Homs University. [Videos](#) show Alawite and Christian women being abducted.

One survivor reported 70 women taken from her village alone. Local media estimated over 100 professional women – including doctors, engineers, and teachers – were kidnapped in just two days. There are widespread fears that some of these women may have been trafficked to Idlib, where HTS has reigned for nearly a decade, and that a market for female slaves or organ trafficking may now exist, similar to practices under ISIS.

A large number of abducted men were also extrajudicially executed. Until 18 February alone, there were at least 53 [documented](#) cases of abductions and extrajudicial killings, though the actual number is certainly much higher.

‘Kill but do not take photos or videos’

HTS's internal orders discouraged the documentation of violations by their armed cadres. Senior Salafi extremist figures, including Huzayfa Azzam and HTS commander Abu Mahmoud al-Sus, instructed militants “kill, but do not take photos or videos.” The violence was framed as “cleansing the remnants of the old regime,” with strict instructions to leave no digital evidence.

Sus was the first person to enter the Syrian state TV studio after the fall of Damascus. At that time, while celebrating the revolution, he gave the message that “all the Syrian people are one.” In stark contrast to that message, however, on 13 January he publicly called for genocide, stating:

“We urge you, if you want to do anything, don't record it. Don't expose yourself and everyone else. Do whatever you want, but don't film it. Filming will only hurt the revolution and revolutionaries. Don't film, and if you film, don't publish. It won't benefit us. It will only give us a headache as we will have to cover it up. No need for it. Do whatever you want, but don't film. It's inconvenient, I give you the freedom to get rid of the [Assadist thugs], nobody will stop you.”

On 6 March, a group calling itself the “Coast Shield” announced armed resistance to the ongoing massacres. A day later, HTS launched a full-scale military campaign across Syria’s coastal region. Villages were bombarded, families killed, homes burned. Mosque loudspeakers in major cities called for the extermination of Alawites.

According to the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights ([SOHR](#)), 6,316 people were killed between 8 December and 18 March. Local documentation suggests the real figure *exceeds 30,000*, with entire villages wiped out.

It was [reported](#) that on 7 and 8 March, in the village of Barmaya near Baniyas, 25 people were killed and 65 houses torched. The Tartous and Banyas countryside were shelled for days, and drone strikes targeted fleeing civilians. In the village of Barmada, homes were looted, then set ablaze. Mass graves were recorded in Jabla and Qardaha. Some bodies were dressed in military fatigues to disguise massacres as combat fatalities.

Deafening international silence

UN condemnation came only after a closed-door session requested by Russian and US Presidents Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. In response, HTS ordered the disposal of bodies to obscure evidence.

Corpses were burned, thrown into the sea, or dumped in ravines. Some families reported that loved ones were buried without their knowledge. In the village of Snobar, survivor Raghda Ali [published](#) a list of over 130 victims, including many from the same family. “The people of my village, my sisters, my neighbors, my relatives are all gone.” She ended her list with the words, “And the list goes on.”

In Baniyas, corpses and homes were set ablaze. Bodies were thrown into valleys. On 11 March, Qardaha, the home village of the Assad family, was torched. One Islamist extremist militant filmed the flames, [boasting](#) that “at least 300 people” had perished.

In one heartbreaking case, [86-year-old Zarqa Sebahiyeh](#) was forced to watch the corpses of her two sons and grandson decompose in the street for four days. She was denied a burial. Her looted house is now occupied by her family's killers, who still live across from her.

When HTS's governor visited to offer condolences, he was accompanied by notorious warlord Hassan Soufan. As grieving mothers pleaded for justice, he replied with a smile, "It won't happen again."

As the bodies pile up and entire villages disappear, the so-called post-war Syria is revealing itself not as a moment of reconciliation, but as a new phase of organized sectarian retribution – enabled by silence, obscured by narrative, and unfolding with impunity.

MAR 28, 2025