

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on minority issues and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

Ref.: AL SYR 5/2025
(Please use this reference in your reply)

15 July 2025

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Special Rapporteur on minority issues and Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 50/7, 54/14, 53/4, 52/5 and 50/18.

In this connection, we would like to follow up on the joint urgent appeal letter dated 27 March 2025 ([UA SYR 2/2025](#)) regarding the alleged violations of human rights against individuals belonging to religion or belief minorities, particularly Alawites, in the coastal region of the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2025. We take note of the reply received on [15 April 2025](#), but remain concerned by the information received.

In particular, we would like to bring to your attention new and deeply concerning information regarding the continued commission of serious human rights violations against Alawite women and girls in the coastal areas of the Syrian Arab Republic since February 2025 until the present. These violations reportedly include a pattern of targeted abductions, enforced disappearances, and other forms of gender-based violence, affecting women and girls, allegedly on the basis of their Alawite religious identity. Among the multiple cases brought to our attention, we would particularly like to highlight the situation of a number of victims that have been reported to the Ministry of Interior of the Provisional Government of the Arab Republic of Syria and have been registered as **cases Nos. [REDACTED], and [REDACTED]**, in which women and girls were reportedly kidnapped or forcibly disappeared, with no meaningful investigative steps or protective measures reportedly taken by the transitional Government to pursue accountability or prevent similar such violations.

According to the information received:

The Alawites are a religious minority in the Syrian Arab Republic, making up 10-15 per cent of the Syrian population and historically concentrated along the Western Coast. The region is home to various other religion or belief minorities. As former Presidents Bashar al-Assad and Hafez al-Assad belonged to the Alawite minority, the community has reportedly been victim of speech inciting hatred and violence based on its members' suspected political affiliation with the former regime, with such targeting being based on their religious identity.

Since February 2025, reports indicate a sharp escalation of violence in the coastal governorates of Latakia and Tartus areas, predominantly inhabited by the Alawite community and historically associated with the remaining structures of the former Assad regime. The deployment of security forces by the then caretaker authorities seemed to have coincided with a rise in serious human rights violations, particularly affecting Alawite women and children.

While kidnappings for ransom have reportedly occurred throughout the conflict in Syria since its beginning in 2011, the recent pattern observed seems to indicate a specific and systematic targeting of Alawite women and girls on the basis of being women and girls, their perceived religious affiliation, and their belonging to that minority. In a minority of reported cases, ransom demands were made, which were not accompanied by proof of life, nor by clear instructions regarding the victims' whereabouts or the process for delivering the ransom. In several other cases, families not only supposedly received messages that called on them to cease efforts to locate their disappeared relatives, but were also reportedly threatened and warned against pursuing further inquiries or speaking publicly about the abductions and disappearances. The youngest victim is a three-year-old girl believed to have been abducted alongside her mother, while the oldest is in her early forties. The reported abductions took place in multiple locations across Syria, including Assila village (Hama), Kafr Debil village near Jableh, Al-Ward neighbourhood (Damascus), Al-Zafaraniyah, Beit Shanta (Homs–Tartus highway), Abu Qubays highway, Safita, Latakia, Musherfeh village (Homs), Ein Ghannam (near Jableh), and Masyaf. According to available information, the abductions occurred in a variety of settings, including on streets and highways, on the way to school, while visiting relatives, mostly during daylight hours.

Out of 38 cases brought to our attention, fewer than ten victims were reportedly later released in April–July 2025 and have testified, indicating that they were drugged and physically assaulted during their abduction. While sexual assault could not be confirmed, it cannot be ruled out, since victims were not provided with an accessible, victim-centred and sensitive reporting process. Female minors were reportedly subjected to forced and child marriages, including during abduction. Judicial authorization, as required under Syrian law in exceptional cases involving the marriage of minors, which is illegal in international law, was reportedly neither provided nor clarified in this instance. In several instances, relatives were allegedly instructed not to speak publicly following the return of the victims. One such case involves a university student who, after being released following a four-day abduction, was reportedly confined at home by her family due to fear of further repercussions. Another case involves a woman who was reportedly abducted and released approximately a week later at the doorstep of her family house, in urgent need of medical attention due to the physical consequences of severe beatings.

We are particularly concerned about the reported lack of effective response by law enforcement authorities in relation to the following cases brought to our attention:

Case No. [REDACTED], filed with Qudssaya Police Station in Damascus, concerning a 32-year-old woman who was abducted on **3 February 2025** from the Massaken Al-Hara neighbourhood. Her family formally reported her disappearance, yet, as now, no progress has been made in the investigation, and her fate and whereabouts remain unknown.

Case No. [REDACTED], registered with the Mahatta Police Station in Hama, concerns a 36-year-old mother of three who was abducted on **20 February 2025** in the town of Assila. Although her husband verbally reported the disappearance to the local police, an official complaint was refused to be registered. Her brother subsequently filed a report, but no investigative action has reportedly followed.

Case No. [REDACTED], reported to General Security in Salhab, Hama, involves a 29-year-old woman who was abducted on **24 March 2025** in the area of Saqlieh - Salhab -Ham. Her family submitted a formal complaint, but to date, no concrete actions or results have been communicated to them.

Case No. [REDACTED], filed with General Security in the Awqaf neighbourhood of Latakia city, concerns the abduction of a 14-year-old girl on **25 March 2025**. She was last seen stepping outside her aunt's hair salon to take a call. Her mother attempted to reach her shortly thereafter but was unsuccessful. Later, her mother allegedly received a ransom demand of USD 10,000, along with threats and a video of a victim in poor shape as proof of life. The daughter was subsequently shown in a video recorded in Aleppo, stating she was married to a 17-year-old boy. Despite this, her mother was reportedly denied private contact with her and was not allowed to bring her home.

There are also growing concerns regarding the treatment of victims upon release, particularly by the General Security Directorate. Some victims were reportedly subjected to prolonged interrogations that were not victim-centred, resulting in their retraumatization. Some were asked to deliver televised statements on their experience, without counting on their full and free consent. They reportedly did not receive the needed medical or psychological support. In one case, a young woman spent over five hours in a General Security facility without access to a female investigator or gender-sensitive healthcare. Her father was made to wait for hours before briefly seeing her and was denied direct access during her questioning. The following day, a version of events believed to have been edited was publicly disseminated. In another case, a woman and her two young daughters were reportedly pressured to deny that they had been abducted.

In a separate case from July 2025, a 19-year-old woman was reportedly abducted by an individual affiliated with the Ministry of Defence and released three days later. Her brother, who attempted to intervene, was reportedly shot by the alleged perpetrator. Despite the serious nature of the incident, no legal action is known to have been taken. The case raises further concerns about the lack of accountability for abuses committed by members of security and defence institutions, as well as the broader climate of impunity surrounding such violations.

Families of the missing persons reportedly faced significant challenges in engaging with law enforcement, citing inconsistent and dismissive responses from both the police and the General Security Directorate. In a number of cases, authorities reportedly either refused to register missing persons reports or accepted them without demonstrating any meaningful follow-up, contributing to a broader erosion of trust in the justice system. Some families were allegedly subjected to condescending and insulting remarks by police, including allegations that the missing women and girls were “loose” or immoral, or that their male relatives were to blame. Even in cases where reports were accepted, the authorities reportedly failed to pursue meaningful investigations, including search activities to determine the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared person, reinforcing perceptions of institutional indifference toward these cases.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, we express concern at the emerging pattern of abductions, enforced disappearances, gender-based violence and intersectional discrimination targeting Alawite women and girls in the Syrian Arab Republic since February 2025 until the present. The cases presented above suggest a widespread failure to prevent, investigate, and respond appropriately to serious violations, including the potential trafficking and unlawful detention of women and girls, many of whom appear to have been targeted on the basis of their gender and perceived sectarian affiliation and/or ethnic or religious belonging. We wish to emphasize the right to complain and the State obligation to receive complaints, to promptly, thoroughly and impartially investigate any act constituting an enforced disappearance. We also call on the State to adequately investigate any allegation of involvement, collusion or acquiescence of State authorities in acts of enforced disappearances.

We are also concerned by the stigmatizing and threatening responses reportedly faced by victims and their families when seeking help, as well as the lack of safe, gender-sensitive reporting mechanisms, female investigators, and psychosocial support for the victims and their families. The absence of transparent investigations and accountability can contribute to an environment of impunity and a climate of fear among Alawite women and girls, many of whom reportedly feel unsafe moving freely in their own communities, fearing they may also be targeted. We underline the importance of establishing accessible and effective legal assistance and protection mechanisms to protect women and girls from all forms of abuse and threats, and to ensure a safe environment for reporting crimes without fear of stigma or retaliation.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.

2. Please provide detailed information on the steps taken by the interim Government to investigate the allegations of enforced disappearances of Alawite women and girls since February 2025, to identify those responsible, to prosecute and sanction them, and to determine the fate and whereabouts of disappeared persons through effective search activities.
3. Please provide an update on the status of investigations into the cases referenced above, including case Nos. [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and the steps that have been taken to determine the fate and whereabouts of the victims, identify and prosecute those responsible, and ensure redress for the affected families.
4. Please explain what measures have been adopted by the interim Government to ensure that women and girls are able to live free from discrimination and violence, and the measures adopted to ensure that survivors of gender-based violence receive medical, psychological, legal, and social support, including through gender-sensitive procedures and personnel.
5. Please indicate what legal and institutional mechanisms exist under the interim Government to ensure that the women and girls victims of such violence, their families or representatives, can report the crimes committed against them without fear of stigma, retaliation, or discriminatory treatment by authorities.
6. Please describe what guarantees are in place to protect the families of victims and witnesses from reprisals, including in cases where individuals are willing to testify publicly or cooperate with investigative mechanisms.
7. Please indicate what steps have been taken to ensure that law enforcement officials, including officers of the General Security Directorate, local police, and other security actors, effectively respond to reports of missing women and girls in a non-discriminatory, respectful, and rights-compliant manner, and what mechanisms are in place to ensure that victim sensitive and gender responsive reception and investigation mechanisms are put in place.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

We would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government that should sources submit the allegations concerning individual cases of enforced disappearances for the consideration of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances under its humanitarian procedure, the case will be examined by the Working Group according to its methods of work, in which case your Excellency's Government will be informed by separate correspondence.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

We may publicly express our concerns in the near future as, in our view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. We also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that we have been in contact with your Excellency's Government's to clarify the issue/s in question.

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

Reem Alsalem

Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

Gabriella Citroni

Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

Morris Tidball-Binz

Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

Nicolas Levrat

Special Rapporteur on minority issues

Laura Nyirinkindi

Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, and without prejudging the accuracy of these allegations, we would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the relevant international norms and standards.

We would first like to underscore the obligation to investigate and punish gross human rights violations and to provide redress to victims. Article 2 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), acceded to by the Syrian Arab Republic on 21 April 1969, establishes that States must adopt measures to ensure that persons whose rights or freedoms are violated have an effective remedy. Article 6 (1) of the ICCPR guarantees the right of every individual to life and security and provides that these rights shall be protected by law and that no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his or her life. In addition, article 7 guarantees the right not to be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. We wish to emphasize Your Excellency Government obligation, under article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, acceded on 28 March 2003, to protect women against gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence as a manifestation of such discrimination, namely, "violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or violence that affects women disproportionately". Gender-based violence includes "acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty. Particular attention should be paid to the investigation of gender-based violence, including killings targeting women and girls.

We note that enforced disappearance constitutes a unique and integrated series of acts and omissions representing a grave threat to life. The deprivation of liberty, followed by a refusal to acknowledge that deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate of the disappeared person, in effect removes that person from the protection of the law and places his or her life at serious and constant risk, for which the State is accountable. It thus results in a violation of the right to life as well as other rights recognized in the ICCPR (general comment 36, para. 58).

Furthermore, in relation to the alleged enforced disappearance, if confirmed, it would amount to violations of articles 6, 7, 9 and 16 of the ICCPR, read alone and in conjunction with article 2(3). Moreover, it would entail a violation of article 7, read alone and in conjunction with article 2(3) of the ICCPR with regard to the relatives of the disappeared person. We are further drawing your Excellency's Government's attention to the absolute and non-derogable prohibition of enforced disappearances (articles 2 and 7), which has attained the status of jus cogens. In this respect, we also make reference to general comment No. 36 (2018) on article 6 of the ICCPR, which states, inter alia, that extreme forms of arbitrary detention that are themselves life-threatening, in particular enforced disappearances, violate the right to personal liberty and personal security and are incompatible with the right to life (para. 57), and that enforced disappearance constitutes a unique and integrated series of acts and omissions representing a grave threat to life, and States parties must take adequate measures to prevent the enforced disappearance of individuals, and conduct an effective and speedy inquiry to establish the fate and whereabouts of persons who may have been subject to

enforced disappearance. (para. 58). We recall article 13 of the Declaration on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which states that any person having knowledge or a legitimate interest who alleges that a person has been subjected to enforced disappearance has the right to complain to a competent and independent State authority and to have that complaint promptly, thoroughly and impartially investigated by that authority. Whenever there are reasonable grounds to believe that an enforced disappearance has been committed, the State shall promptly refer the matter to that authority for such an investigation, even if there has been no formal complaint. Article 13 also states that steps shall be taken to ensure that all involved in the investigation, including witnesses, are protected against ill-treatment, intimidation or reprisal.

We would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government article 20 of the Declaration, which establishes the need to protect the best interests of children and the specific obligations when enforced disappearance of children is at stake. In this regard, the general comment of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on children and enforced disappearances (A/HRC/WGEID/98/1) emphasizes that child victims of enforced disappearance suffer particularly severe harm in these situations and the separation of children from their families has specific and especially serious effects on their personal integrity that have a lasting impact, and causes great physical and mental harm (paras. 1 and 6). Moreover, "any custody determination must take into account a child's best interest, protect the child from discrimination, and respect the child's views concerning the matter" (para. 21).

We further refer to the General Comment from the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances regarding the Right to the Truth in Relation to Enforced Disappearances ([A/HRC/16/48](#)), which highlights that the right of the relatives to know the truth of the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared persons is an absolute right, not subject to any limitation or derogation. The State has the obligation to let any interested person know the concrete steps taken to clarify the fate and the whereabouts of the person. Such information must include the steps taken on the basis of the evidence provided by the relatives or other witnesses. The relatives of the victims should be closely associated with an investigation into a case of enforced disappearance.

Human Rights Council resolution 12/11 on Human rights and transitional justice reaffirmed the responsibility of States to prosecute perpetrators of gross violations of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law, constituting crimes under international law, with a view to ending impunity (paragraph 7). The Human Rights Committee, in its general comment No. 31, have also emphasised the obligation of States to investigate and punish serious human rights violations, such as torture, extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. Failure to investigate and prosecute such violations is in itself a breach of the norms of human rights treaties (paragraph 18). Failure to investigate and prosecute such violations is in itself a breach of the norms of human rights treaties. Impunity for such violations can be an important element contributing to the recurrence of violations.

Furthermore, regarding addressing the acts of violence against women and girls in Syrian Arab Republic, we recall that the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women adopted by the General Assembly resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993, which defines violence against women in article 2 as encompassing, but not

limited to physical, sexual and psychological violence.¹

The Declaration states that women are entitled to equal enjoyment and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other fields. These rights include, inter alia, (a) the right to life; (b) the right to equality; (c) the right to liberty and security; and (d) the right to equal protection under the law (article 3). In article 4(g), the Declaration notes the importance of ensuring that women subjected to violence receive specialized assistance, such as rehabilitation, assistance in childcare, treatment, counselling, and health and social services, facilities and programmes, as well as support structures, and should take all other appropriate measures to promote their safety and physical and psychological rehabilitation.

The Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls emphasized in her report that sexual and gender-based violence in conflict is rarely incidental, as it is often used as a tool of intimidation, punishment, and social control. (A/78/256) She underscored that women and girls belonging to specific ethnic, religious, or political communities are disproportionately targeted and, therefore, face heightened vulnerability to intersectional violence, including kidnapping, enforced disappearance, and trafficking, particularly in conflict or crisis contexts. In her report on “Institutional violence and the denial of access to services for women and girls”, the Special Rapporteur also noted that gender-based violence often intersects with state failure or inaction, particularly where survivors are dismissed, blamed, or retraumatized during institutional engagement.” (A/HRC/53/37) She identified the lack of gender-sensitive infrastructure, including the absence of female investigators and safe reporting channels, as serious barriers to justice for victims.

Furthermore, we would also like to remind that persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language (article 27 of the ICCPR). The Special Rapporteur on minority issues highlighted that peacebuilding processes and transitional periods are both a time for major institutional changes and an opportunity to alleviate potential tensions between different groups co-existing within a single but diverse, peaceful, stable and inclusive society. It is essential to build strong, inclusive and resilient institutions to ensure that the conditions for a lasting peace are met, and that the fate of minorities does not become or remain a destabilizing factor (A/79/169, paras. 21 and 44). Women belonging to minority groups face unique challenges and must be empowered to participate meaningfully in peacebuilding processes and decision-making roles. Such institutional designs should be centred around the effective participation of persons belonging to minorities in decision-making processes (A/79/169, para. 15).

¹ The Syrian Arab Republic made a reservation to this article, where the provisions of international law may be assessed as conflicting with the domestic interpretations