



UNITED STATES COMMISSION *on* INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

USCIRF HEARING SUMMARY:

December 2025

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN SYRIA'S POST-ASSAD TRANSITION

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USCIRF's Mission

To advance international freedom of religion or belief, by independently assessing and unflinchingly confronting threats to this fundamental right.

On November 13, 2025, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) held a hearing entitled [*Religious Freedom in Syria's Post-Assad Transition*](#). USCIRF Commissioners Meir Soloveichik and Stephen Schneck led the hearing, which included testimony from members of civil society. Witnesses discussed current religious freedom conditions in Syria as well as potential policy options for the U.S. government to advance freedom of religion or belief there.

[*Commissioner Soloveichik*](#) opened the hearing by providing background on Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the previous iteration of Syria's new transitional authorities that overthrew the regime of former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. USCIRF has recommended for several years that the U.S. Department of State designate HTS an "entity of particular concern" for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Commissioner Soloveichik expressed serious concerns about the new authorities' lack of will or ability to stop sectarian violence, criminal acts, or attacks on houses of worship targeting Syria's religious communities, including Alawis, Druze, Shi'a Muslims, and Christians.

[*Commissioner Schneck*](#) provided additional remarks about USCIRF's decision to recommend Syria for placement on the Special Watch List in 2025. He underscored that prior to the fall of the Assad regime, nonstate actors like HTS were the primary perpetrators of particularly severe religious freedom violations in Syria. Commissioner Schneck ended his testimony by emphasizing that the Syrian transitional authorities have a duty under international law to protect and preserve freedom of religion or belief.

[*Aaron Zelin*](#), Gloria and Ken Levy Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, argued that Syrian transitional authorities' failure to adequately and transparently address transitional justice issues has undermined its credibility among Syria's religious and ethnic communities and moreover resulted in increased vigilantism throughout the country. He added that U.S. policymakers must urge officials to be more forthcoming about holding war criminals accountable and push them to host national and local dialogues to ease tensions and ensure inclusion of Syria's many communities.

[*Rita Koefoed Khairbek*](#), Founder of Syrian Women for Development in Norway, testified about the violence the Alawi community in Syria has endured following HTS's takeover of the country. Kidnappings, extrajudicial killings, and sexual violence targeting Alawis—which transitional authorities have either tolerated or perpetrated—are the direct result of a religious ideology that dehumanizes Alawis, she argued. Ms. Khairbek concluded her testimony by urging the U.S. government to prioritize the Syrian government's protection of minorities and to support independent investigations and mechanisms.



[Nuri Kino](#), Founder of A Demand for Action, noted the sharp decrease of Syria's Christian population since 2011 and characterized the violence targeting them and their religious sites as part of a systematic campaign to remove them from their homelands. He recommended that the U.S. government condition sanctions relief on clear, measurable improvements in religious freedom conditions, provide security guarantees to protect Christian religious sites, and support local Syrian civil society.

[Jamil Ammar](#), a Syrian Druze scholar and activist, outlined and included examples of the four strategies Syrian transitional authorities use to facilitate sectarian violence: disinformation campaigns, state disarmament and proxy group violence, indiscriminate killings, and strategic gamesmanship. He raised concerns that Syria's educational system is at risk of fostering a new generation of extremists.

Following witness testimonies, Commissioner Soloveichik led a question-and-answer session where witnesses further discussed transitional justice, forced marriage and other sexual violence against religious minorities, foreign fighters in Syria, legal protections supporting civil rights for Christians, and regional autonomy for religious and ethnic groups.

Witnesses delved deeper into their policy recommendations to the U.S. government. Mr. Zelin discussed other steps Syrian transitional authorities could take to reduce tensions, including disarming local populations and clamping down on media inciting sectarian violence. Ms. Khairbek discussed how sexual violence toward Alawi women traumatizes entire families, underscoring her U.S. policy recommendation to support survivors. Mr. Kino urged the U.S. government to establish a Special Envoy for Religious Freedom in Syria to showcase its commitment to a pluralistic Syria. Mr. Ammar called on the United States to open consultations with religious groups, including Druze and Sunni Muslims not ideologically aligned with the new transitional authorities.

Commissioner Soloveichik concluded the hearing by thanking the witnesses for their testimony.

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