

**Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or
Arbitrary Executions: Documenting, Investigating, and Preventing Arbitrary
Deprivation of Life of Older Persons**

May 2026

Submission by
Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights
With a focus on Syria

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About Ceasefire:

Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights is an international non-governmental organisation based in the UK which supports civilian-led monitoring of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, empowers civilians to secure justice, and promotes civilian protection and military accountability. Ceasefire works in a number of conflict-affected jurisdictions in the Middle East, Africa and Europe, operating in some of the world's most challenging environments. In Syria, Ceasefire works closely with Syrian CSOs and has documented hundreds of violations and produced several reports on patterns of violation over the last five years. It is currently implementing an EU-funded programme in which more than 800 reports of human rights violations were documented through partnered CSOs across the different regions in Syria.

1. Introduction and purpose of submission:

This submission is provided in response to the call for input issued by the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions for the report on “*Documenting, Investigating and Preventing Arbitrary Deprivation of Life of Older Persons,*” to be presented at the 81st session of the UN General Assembly in October 2026.

The submission examines patterns of arbitrary deprivation of life affecting older persons during recent episodes of sectarian violence in Syria, with a particular focus on the violence affecting Syria's coastal region in March 2025 and As-Suwayda in July 2025. It highlights concerns relating to summary and arbitrary executions of older civilians and seeks to contribute evidence on the specific risks and vulnerabilities faced by older persons in situations of armed violence and political transition.

The submission draws on testimonies and documentation collected by Ceasefire through its Syrian civil society partners working across different regions of Syria. The testimonies included in this submission were collected from affected communities in As-Suwayda and Syria's coastal region. Information included in this submission is based on witness accounts and family testimonies and has been verified through open-source material and reports from peer organisations. Given the ongoing security environment and the risks faced by witnesses and local partners, certain identifying details have been withheld for protection and confidentiality purposes.

The submission further seeks to highlight recurring patterns emerging from documented cases, including the apparent lack of specific protection measures for older persons and the intersection of age-related vulnerabilities with conflict-related risks. Through these findings, Ceasefire aims to support efforts to strengthen protection and contribute to accountability measures concerning arbitrary deprivation of life affecting older persons in conflict settings.

2. Context:

Following the ousting of the Assad regime in December 2024, after a lightning offensive led by HTS and the subsequent establishment of the Syrian interim government, Syria entered a fragile and highly volatile transitional period. While the political transition raised expectations for greater stability, the security situation across the country remained fragmented. Throughout 2025, Syria witnessed waves of localised violence and escalating sectarian tensions in several regions. Notably, major outbreaks of violence occurred during the sectarian clashes in the coastal region in March 2025 and later in As-Suwayda in July 2025. These incidents resulted in significant civilian harm, including reports of unlawful killings, summary executions of civilians, reprisals, and attacks targeting communities along sectarian lines, including vulnerable groups such as older persons, women, and children.

The March 2025 violence in Syria's coastal region represented one of the most severe outbreaks of violence since the collapse of the Assad government, the establishment of the interim government, and the restructuring of opposition armed groups under a unified command framework involving HTS, factions of the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army, and other affiliated actors.

Casualty estimates from the March 2025 violence differed across sources, with reported death tolls ranging from 1,426, according to the Syrian government's fact-finding committee¹, to 1,562, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)², while the UN Commission of Inquiry estimated approximately 1,400 fatalities³.

The violence reportedly began following coordinated attacks by armed men affiliated with former regime against the newly formed government forces in coastal areas. Subsequent military and security operations reportedly involved Defense and Interior Ministry forces, alongside government-affiliated armed groups and mobilised volunteers, who carried out operations across predominantly Alawite towns and villages in Tartous, Latakia, and Jablah. Reports by several human rights organisations documented large-scale displacement and widespread allegations of unlawful killings, summary executions, revenge attacks, looting, identity-based violence targeting civilians, destruction and burning of homes, and allegations of mass burial sites.^{4 5}

Similarly, the July 2025 violence in As-Suwayda resulted in significant civilian casualties and large-scale displacement. Casualty estimates varied across sources. Official figures reported

¹ Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), <https://sana.sy/locals/2253222/>

² Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), <https://snhr.org/blog/2025/04/09/1562-deaths-including-102-children-and-99-women-as-well-as-33-medical-personnel-recorded-in-march-2025-in-syria/>

³Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session59/a-hrc-59-crp4-en.pdf>

⁴ Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/09/23/are-you-alawi/identity-based-killings-during-syrias-transition>

⁵ Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/latest/syria-brutal-mass-killings-alawite-civilians-must-be-investigated-war-crimes-new/>

1,760 deaths⁶, while the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) estimated 1,707 fatalities⁷, the majority of whom were reportedly Druze civilians, alongside Bedouin civilians and combatants.

According to the UN Commission of Inquiry, government forces, accompanied by Bedouin fighters, committed widespread violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law against Druze civilians between 14 and 16 July 2025 in western As-Suwayda Governorate and As-Suwayda city. Reports further documented allegations of summary executions, retaliatory killings, and attacks against civilians, including women, children, and older persons. Available reporting suggests that abuses involved multiple actors, including local armed Druze groups, Bedouin armed groups, and government-affiliated forces operating in the area.

3. Overview of documented cases and emerging patterns:

Ceasefire documented hundreds of cases involving the summary execution of civilians during the two major episodes of violence in Syria, including cases involving women, children, and older persons. Among these, nine documented cases involved the summary execution of older persons, highlighting the particular risks faced by this group during periods of sectarian violence. Of the nine documented cases included in this submission, eight were collected from As-Suwayda and predominantly reflect the experiences of affected Druze communities, while one case relates to the violence in Syria's coastal region.

Across the documented cases, a consistent pattern emerges in which older persons, despite their civilian status, age-related vulnerabilities, and absence of participation in hostilities, appeared to receive no specific protection during episodes of sectarian violence. Several victims had reduced mobility, chronic illnesses, or other vulnerabilities limiting their ability to flee or protect themselves. Testimonies further suggest that the killings occurred within a broader context of identity-based and sectarian violence, with some witnesses reporting the use of sectarian language, insults, and threats during attacks.

Many were killed inside homes, shelters, or while seeking safety with relatives. Testimonies further indicate that killings were frequently accompanied by looting, intimidation, destruction of property, and restrictions on the recovery of bodies. The reported circumstances raise concerns regarding arbitrary deprivation of life and suggest that older persons may have faced heightened risks during the violence while lacking effective protection mechanisms.

4. Key findings and patterns:

4.1 Indications of identity-based and sectarian targeting

Several documented testimonies suggest that the killings occurred within a broader context of sectarian violence and may have involved identity-based targeting. Witness accounts in some

⁶ Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), <https://sana.sy/locals/2428586/>

⁷Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session61/a-hrc-61-crp-7.pdf>

cases reported the use of sectarian language, insults, and threats during attacks, while the incidents themselves occurred in areas affected by violence directed at particular communities.

Witnesses also described recurring characteristics among alleged perpetrators. In several cases, armed individuals were reportedly described as wearing black uniforms, camouflage clothing, green military-style uniforms, robes of different colours, and insignia associated with General Security and Ministry of Defence-affiliated forces, with some also reportedly wearing black armbands and carrying banners bearing religious Islamic slogans that witnesses associated with ISIS symbolism. However, in several incidents, witnesses were unable to identify specific affiliations because multiple armed actors were reportedly operating simultaneously in affected areas.

A recurring pattern across collected testimonies involved reports of armed actors entering Druze communities while using sectarian language and referring to Druze individuals as "infidels". Witnesses further reported statements such as "we are coming to impose God's law." While such accounts do not allow definitive conclusions regarding motive in every individual case, they raise concerns that sectarian identity may have contributed to the targeting of victims, including older persons.

4.2 Older persons were killed despite their civilian status and visible vulnerability

Across the documented cases, older persons who were reportedly killed appeared to be civilians and there is no information indicating that they were participating in hostilities at the time of the incidents. Victims included retired civilians, displaced persons, religious figures, and older residents sheltering with family members or remaining in their homes during the violence. Despite their civilian status and visible age-related vulnerabilities, testimonies do not indicate that they benefited from any specific protection measures.

In one testimony, one of the perpetrators initially appeared reluctant to remove the victim after observing his age (74). However, another allegedly overruled this and forcibly separated him from his family before removing him from the apartment, where he was subsequently killed.

In another testimony, a 75-year-old victim and his two sons reportedly opened the door of their home and greeted arriving forces in accordance with local customs. However, following a brief exchange, they were reportedly shot and killed. Witnesses recalled that armed men allegedly opened fire directly on the victim and his two sons at the entrance of their home, killing them immediately.

While older persons are often afforded particular respect and consideration under local customs in Syria, the testimonies collected in these cases do not suggest that the age, civilian status, and particular vulnerabilities of older persons provided any meaningful protection. On the contrary, the reported incidents indicate that older individuals were exposed to the same forms of violence as others.

4.3 Age-related vulnerabilities increased exposure to harm

Several documented cases indicate that age-related factors significantly increased exposure to risk. Victims reportedly suffered from reduced mobility, chronic illnesses, disability, or other

health conditions that limited their ability to flee, relocate, or seek protection. These vulnerabilities appear to have reduced their capacity to respond to security threats and life threatening situations arising from the conflict and may have impacted their ability to evacuate and access to safety.

Documented examples include an 80-year-old victim with severe mobility limitations following a stroke, a 72-year-old individual dependent on a home oxygen device because of severe heart and lung disease, and several older individuals who remained in their homes due to age, health conditions, or inability to evacuate safely.

Testimonies suggest that some individuals remained in their residences not necessarily by choice, but because physical conditions, limited mobility, or reliance on medical support reduced available options for movement and relocation. In some cases, particularly involving individuals over the age of 80, displacement itself may have posed significant risks, especially where individuals required assistance to move or maintain essential medical support.

These factors appear to have significantly restricted self-protection options during periods of violence and insecurity and may have contributed to heightened exposure to harm.

4.4 Homes and shelter locations did not provide effective protection

A significant number of documented incidents occurred inside locations that would ordinarily be considered places of civilian safety, including private homes, residential buildings, temporary shelter locations, and family residences used during displacement. Several victims were reportedly killed while sheltering with family members, remaining in their homes during insecurity, or seeking temporary refuge following displacement. In one documented case, an older married couple, aged 74 and 85, were reportedly found dead inside their residence after remaining in their home despite escalating violence in the area. Testimonies indicate that family members had repeatedly encouraged them to leave; however, they chose to remain in the residence as armed actors moved through surrounding neighbourhoods.

Other testimonies suggest a similar pattern. In one documented case, an older man with a severe medical condition remained in his residence because his condition prevented evacuation. Armed actors reportedly entered the home repeatedly, looted essential property, and the circumstances that followed reportedly contributed to the deterioration of his condition and subsequent death.

The documented cases suggest that civilian spaces did not provide effective protection from violence and, in some instances, became locations where older persons were exposed to serious harm.

4.5 Older persons were reportedly removed, isolated, or left exposed during attacks

Some testimonies suggest that older persons were removed from family members or otherwise left particularly exposed during attacks. In one case, an older man was reportedly separated from women and children after armed actors entered a residence where family members had sought refuge following displacement. Despite his age and civilian status, he was allegedly removed together with younger male relatives before being killed.

In another, a physically disabled elderly victim with severe mobility limitations following a stroke was reportedly removed from his home despite family members informing armed actors that he was unable to move because of his medical condition. Testimonies indicate that he was forcibly taken from his bed and removed from the house in front of his family before his body was found in agricultural land near his town bearing gunshot wounds to the chest and back.

These accounts may indicate that older persons, including those with visible age-related vulnerability, were not spared from removal, separation from family members, or direct exposure to violence during attacks.

4.6 Arbitrary deprivation of life was frequently accompanied by additional violations

Documented incidents indicate that killings often occurred alongside other forms of abuse and violence. Testimonies frequently reported looting of homes and personal belongings, destruction and burning of property, intimidation of civilians, sectarian insults and threats, restrictions on movement, and interference with the recovery and burial of victims. In several cases, witnesses described armed actors entering civilian homes, threatening residents, verbally abusing civilians using sectarian language, and restricting the movement of individuals attempting to seek safety or assist family members.

In one case, property essential for sustaining life, including a solar energy system required to power a medical oxygen device, was reportedly looted along with other valuables. Testimony indicates that the loss of the power system necessary for operating the device contributed to the rapid deterioration of the victim's health condition and subsequently to his death after experiencing severe breathing difficulties.

Several testimonies further indicate that insecurity and movement restrictions interfered with the recovery and burial of victims. In some cases, family members were reportedly unable to retrieve bodies immediately because of fears of being shot or threatened by armed actors present in the area. One testimony indicates that relatives were required to seek permission from armed individuals before burial procedures could take place, while in another, bodies reportedly remained in place until the following day because ongoing violence prevented safe recovery. Some family members reportedly witnessed the aftermath of killings or remained exposed to ongoing threats.

The documented accounts further suggest significant psychological and emotional harm associated with prolonged insecurity, exposure to violence, and restrictions affecting dignified burial procedures.

4.7 Older male civilians appeared particularly exposed to violence

The documented cases show that the majority of older persons directly affected by summary killings were male civilians. Victims included retirees, religious figures, displaced persons, and older men remaining in their homes or sheltering with family members during periods of violence and insecurity.

Several testimonies further suggest that older men were, in some instances, specifically separated from women and children during attacks or remained particularly exposed during

house raids and armed operations. In one documented case, an older man was reportedly removed together with younger male relatives after armed actors entered a residence where family members had sought refuge following displacement.

While the documented cases are limited in number and do not permit definitive conclusions regarding patterns of gender-based targeting, including because one documented case involved an older married couple killed in their home, the testimonies may nevertheless suggest that older male civilians faced particular exposure to violence during armed raids, house searches, and attacks affecting civilian areas. This is further reflected in the fact that eight of the nine documented cases involved older male victims.