

One Year After the Suweida Massacres: Women Continue to Demand Truth, Justice, and Accountability



Introduction

July 2026 marks one year since the [massacres](#) that devastated Syria's southern governorate of Suweida, one of the gravest episodes of violence in the country's recent history. What began in July 2025 as armed confrontations rapidly escalated into widespread attacks against civilians, including reported summary executions, sectarian attacks, enforced disappearances, kidnappings, torture, [sexual](#) and gender-based violence, including reported cases of [rape](#), attacks on medical facilities, widespread destruction and looting of civilian property, and other alleged violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

According to Syrian and international human rights documentation, at least [1,700](#) people were reported killed during the violence, the majority of whom are civilians from the Druze minority sect, as well as members of the Bedouin community, and at least 225 government personnel. Civilians targeted included women, children, older persons, medical personnel, and humanitarian workers. Hundreds of civilians were reportedly summarily executed, while families were reportedly targeted in identity-based attacks. More than 80 women and girls were abducted, with many later released, some confirmed to have been killed, and others remaining forcibly disappeared one year later. Survivors of sexual and gender-based violence continue to face profound physical and psychological trauma, stigma, and limited access to survivor-centered support and justice. Families continue to search for missing relatives without answers, while the fate and whereabouts of many disappeared persons remains unresolved.

The violence triggered one of the largest displacement crises in southern Syria in recent years. Nearly [200,000](#) people were displaced from their homes. At the same time, at least 35 villages and numerous residential neighborhoods suffered widespread destruction, looting, and arson, with UN reporting documenting extensive destruction in some affected villages. Thousands of families remain unable to return safely because of ongoing insecurity, destroyed homes and infrastructure, and the absence of guarantees for protection, justice, and accountability.

One year on, the humanitarian consequences remain profound. Women continue to shoulder the burden of caring for displaced families, supporting survivors, and searching for the forcibly disappeared while coping with deep psychological trauma and ongoing insecurity. The educational impact has also been significant. The disruption of public education and repeated interruptions to national secondary examinations have significantly affected students' ability to complete their studies under normal conditions. Uncertainty surrounding access to higher education has placed additional pressure on many young people, particularly those already affected by displacement and insecurity. These continued disruptions threaten not only

individual aspirations but also the long-term social and economic recovery of Suweida governorate.

Despite the scale of documented atrocities and the establishment of national investigative mechanisms, survivors continue to confront profound gaps in independent, impartial, and effective accountability. While transitional authorities have initiated investigations and judicial proceedings, questions remain regarding the scope, independence, and effectiveness of these accountability efforts and whether they will address the full range of violations committed during the violence, including unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, kidnappings, [torture](#), sexual and gender-based violence, attacks against civilians, and other serious abuses. The continued lack of clarity regarding accountability processes has reinforced a climate of impunity that prolongs the suffering of victims, survivors, and their families.

As the first anniversary of the Suweida massacres is marked, this dispatch centers the voices of women human rights defenders, survivors, and families of victims who continue to document violations despite immense personal risk. Their testimonies remind us that remembrance without accountability cannot deliver justice and that failure to address these violations risks perpetuating impunity. One year on, their calls remain clear: the truth must be established, those responsible must be held accountable, survivors must receive meaningful support, and the rights and dignity of the people of Suweida must be protected.



N.S., Syrian Feminist Activist, Suweida: “Women Were Carrying the Weight of Survival”

The following reflection was written by a Syrian feminist activist from Suweida who has been documenting the impact of the violence on women and communities. Her account examines not only the violations committed during the violence, but also the gendered consequences that continued afterward: displacement, stigma, economic insecurity, the search for missing persons, and the burden placed on women to sustain their communities.

“In July 2025, my parents were sitting in their home in our village in Suweida, waiting for the government forces that were said to be arriving to ‘separate the fighting’ between armed groups and residents. This was the message many people heard and believed.

My mother heard the shelling getting closer and asked my father what was happening. He kept telling her, ‘It is only to stop the fighting.’ When my uncle called and told them to leave immediately, my mother did not wait any longer. Despite my father’s broken leg, they left with only the clothes they were wearing and drove toward the city under heavy shelling.

Many other women were not able to leave. Some believed the situation would remain limited; some had no transportation or a safe place to go; and others had no one who would listen to their warnings. Some remained in their homes trying to protect their children and families. They witnessed killings, abductions, and acts of sexual and gender-based violence.

The fear experienced by women was not created in a vacuum. Documented cases of sexual violence, including rape, sexual humiliation, and threats of sexual violence, have shown the particular risks faced by women and girls during the violence. Yet many survivors continue to face barriers to speaking openly because of stigma, fear, and concerns about their safety.

After the massacre, many women began asking: how do we save those who remain? Women organized aid initiatives, prepared food, distributed medicine, cared for children, supported injured people, followed up on missing persons, and helped maintain education during a time when institutions were failing.

Their work was often described simply as care work, but it was much more than that. Organizing assistance, identifying community needs, protecting families, and rebuilding networks of solidarity were forms of public action and crisis response.

Women should not be remembered only as victims of violence. They are survivors, witnesses, organizers, and participants in shaping the future of their communities.

Justice must include women's voices. It must recognize the violence they experienced, the work they carried out afterward, and their right to participate in decisions about accountability and rebuilding."

L.K., 33 years old, Family Member of a Disappeared Person: "My Brother Left Home That Morning and Never Came Back"

"My brother left home that morning and never came back. At first, we believed he would return. We thought maybe he was detained somewhere, maybe someone would give us information. But the days passed, then the weeks, and we were still searching.

We went from one place to another looking for any news. We contacted officials, asked hospitals, spoke to anyone who might know something. Every unanswered call, every closed door, brought more fear. The hardest part is not only losing someone, it is living without knowing whether they are alive or what happened to them.

A year has passed, but our family is still trapped in that moment. We cannot fully grieve because we do not have the truth. Families of the disappeared deserve answers. We need to know what happened to our loved ones, where they are, and who was responsible.

Justice begins with acknowledging our pain and ending the silence surrounding the disappeared."



R.A., 42 years old, Displaced Woman from Suweida: “We Thought We Would Return Within Days”

“When we left our home, we thought we would return within days. We took only the things we could carry because we believed the violence would end quickly. We never imagined that one year later we would still be away from the place where our entire life was built.

A home is not only walls and furniture. It is the memories inside it, the rooms where our children grew up, the gatherings with our families, the everyday moments that make a life. Losing our home meant losing a part of our identity.

But displacement is not only about losing a house. It is about living with uncertainty every day. We ask ourselves: Can we return safely? Will we be protected? Will our children have a future there? Will we have to experience the same fear again?

Women have carried a heavy responsibility during this time. We cared for children, supported elderly relatives, helped survivors, searched for missing family members, and tried to keep our families together while carrying our own pain.

Returning home requires more than rebuilding buildings. It requires safety, justice, and guarantees that people’s dignity and rights will be protected.”

M.M., 27 years old, Woman Supporting Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: “Many Women Are Carrying Their Pain Silently”

“Many women who experienced violence are carrying their pain silently. Some are afraid of stigma, some fear retaliation, and others fear that they will not be believed or that speaking will bring them more harm.

Sexual and gender-based violence does not end when the physical violence stops. Survivors continue living with trauma, fear, isolation, and sometimes rejection from the very communities that should support them.

We have seen that survivors do not only ask for punishment of perpetrators. They ask to be recognized and treated with dignity. They need safe medical care, psychological support, legal assistance, and a justice process that protects them rather than causing further suffering.

The responsibility is not on survivors to prove their pain. The responsibility is on institutions and communities to create conditions where women can speak without fear. Accountability must include women’s experiences. Their voices cannot be treated as secondary or added later.”

O.R., 21 year old, Young Woman and Student from Suweida: “The Future I Had Been Working Toward Felt Like It Was Put on Hold”

“Before the massacres, I had plans. I was studying, preparing for my exams, and imagining what my future would look like. Suddenly, everything became uncertain. The future I had been working toward felt like it was put on hold.

For us as students, losing education is not only about missing classes or exams. It is losing time, opportunities, and a sense of normal life. Many young people have already experienced displacement, fear, and loss. Education was one of the few things that gave us hope.

We feel this pressure deeply. We worry about whether we will continue our studies, whether we will have the same opportunities as before, and whether circumstances beyond our control will determine our future.

We do not want to be remembered only as a generation affected by violence. We want the chance to study, work, and rebuild our communities. Education is not only about certificates. It is about dignity, independence, and having the ability to shape our own future.”

F.D., 31 years old, Community Humanitarian Worker, Suweida: “We Treated Physical Wounds, But We Also Saw Wounds That Could Not Be Seen”

“During the violence, people came to us carrying injuries, fear, and shock. We as medical workers were trying to respond to enormous needs while facing the same insecurity and uncertainty as everyone else.

We treated physical wounds, but we also saw wounds that could not be seen. Families had lost loved ones, children were terrified, and many people were struggling to understand what had happened to them.

When the immediate violence decreased, the suffering did not end. People still needed healthcare, medicine, psychological support, and assistance rebuilding their lives. Recovery is not only about repairing damaged buildings. A community cannot heal without restoring people’s sense of safety and trust.

The future of Suweida depends on protecting civilians, supporting survivors, and ensuring that the suffering people endured is not forgotten.”

Conclusion and demands

One year has passed, yet for the people of Suweida the violence has not truly ended. The killings have ceased, but families continue searching for the disappeared. Survivors continue to live with trauma, displacement, and loss. Women continue to lead their communities while demanding answers that have yet to come. Girls continue to face barriers to education, and entire communities remain deprived of justice.

This anniversary should not become another moment of remembrance without action. It must serve as a renewed call for accountability and for the protection of civilians whose rights continue to be violated long after the world's attention has faded.

We call on the Syrian transitional authorities to:

- Ensure that all investigations and judicial proceedings related to the Suweida violence are independent, impartial, transparent, and consistent with international fair trial standards, including safeguards against political interference.
- Ensure that accountability efforts address the full scope of violations committed, including unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, torture, sexual and gender-based violence, attacks against civilians, and destruction and looting of civilian property.
- Publicly communicate the progress and findings of investigations, while ensuring meaningful protection for witnesses, survivors, victims' families, and those participating in justice processes.
- Clarify the fate and whereabouts of all missing and forcibly disappeared persons, provide families with timely information, and establish effective mechanisms for tracing missing persons.
- Guarantee the meaningful participation of survivors, victims' families, women human rights defenders, and affected communities in accountability, reconciliation, and recovery processes.
- Ensure that survivors of sexual and gender-based violence have access to confidential, survivor-centered medical, psychosocial, legal, and protection services.
- Guarantee conditions for the safe, voluntary, and dignified return of displaced communities, including protection from further violations and access to essential services.
- Protect civil society actors, journalists, and human rights defenders from intimidation, retaliation, or restrictions for documenting violations.

We call on the international community to:

- Support independent monitoring of accountability efforts and ensure that any domestic justice process meets international standards of independence, impartiality, and effectiveness.
- Establish or support international mechanisms to investigate serious violations where domestic processes are unable or unwilling to provide meaningful accountability.
- Maintain pressure to clarify the fate and whereabouts of all missing and forcibly disappeared persons and support efforts to assist affected families.
- Provide sustained humanitarian, medical, psychosocial, legal, and economic support to survivors, displaced families, and communities affected by the violence.
- Support survivor-centered programs addressing the needs of women and girls affected by sexual and gender-based violence, including protection, healthcare, and long-term recovery services.
- Ensure continued support for Syrian civil society organizations, women human rights defenders, journalists, and documentation initiatives that preserve evidence for future justice processes.
- Support the restoration of education and ensure that girls and young women affected by the violence have safe and equitable access to schools, universities, and examinations.
- Assist in the safe and dignified recovery of displaced communities, including reconstruction, basic services, and guarantees of protection.

The women of Suweida have spent the past year documenting crimes, protecting their communities, and refusing to let the truth disappear alongside those who remain missing. Their demands are simple: truth, justice, accountability, and the guarantee that these atrocities will never be repeated.



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