



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

Syria - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Monday 8 April 2019

Information on the security/safety situation nationwide/Damascus

A report issued in January 2019 by the *United Nations Human Rights Council* states that:

“Extensive military gains made by pro-government forces throughout the first half of 2018, coupled with an agreement between Turkey and the Russian Federation to establish a demilitarized zone in the north-west, led to a significant decrease in armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic in the period from mid July 2018 to mid January 2019. Hostilities elsewhere, however, remain ongoing. Attacks by pro-government forces in Idlib and western Aleppo Governorates, and those carried out by the Syrian Democratic Forces and the international coalition in Dayr al-Zawr Governorate, continue to cause scores of civilian casualties” (United Nations Human Rights Council (31 January 2019) *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, p.1).

This document also states that:

“Outside of the north and north-west, the success of fierce battles carried out by government forces between January and July 2018 in Aleppo, Damascus, Rif Dimashq, Dar’a, Hama and northern Homs...affected conflict dynamics dramatically and facilitated major shifts towards the consolidation of power by the State. Following the cessation of hostilities and the subsequent implementation of local truces in the those areas, government forces regained control over more territory than they had administered since the onset of the conflict” (ibid, pp.14-15).

A paper produced in February 2019 by the *World Bank/UNHCR* points out that:

“...the trajectory of the war has consolidated territorial control under forces loyal to the Syrian government, though that consolidation today may be best described as fragmented” (World Bank/UNHCR (5 February 2019) *The Mobility of Displaced Syrians*, p.72).

In February 2019 the *Danish Immigration Service* states in a report that:

“During the spring and summer of 2018, the Syrian government took control of major opposition strongholds as well as of large areas of territory in south Syria, including Yarmouk, Eastern Ghouta and Der’aa...At present the government is controlling most areas in Syria...”(Danish Immigration Service (21 February 2019) *Syria: Security Situation in Damascus Province and Issues Regarding Return to Syria*, p.5).

This document also states that:

“The general security situation in government-controlled areas in Syria, including major cities, such as Latakia, Homs, Hama, Tartous and Damascus, has improved significantly since May 2018...Overall, there has been a significant decrease of

military confrontations and a major reduction in the number of security incidents...” (ibid, p.5).

A report issued in February 2019 by the *International Crisis Group* states that:

“In July 2018, with the help of Russia, the Syrian regime retook the country’s south, where the popular uprising was born seven years earlier. State institutions, including security agencies, returned, and the population – civilians and defeated rebels – had to adjust. Six months later, recovery is moving at a snail’s pace...” (International Crisis Group (25 February 2019) *Lessons from the Syrian State’s Return to the South*, p.i).

This document also states that:

“Two principal factors discourage refugees and the displaced from returning. The first is the glaring lack of functioning infrastructure, services and employment. Roads are open and supplies are coming in. Yet the state’s return also meant the end of crossborder assistance from Jordan, which the regime rejected as an infringement on its sovereignty” (ibid, p.i).

It is also pointed out in this report that:

“The second factor is the evolving security situation. Upon its return, the regime arrested hundreds of formally cleared rebels and civilians with a track record of unarmed opposition activity, marking the reappearance of unaccountable security agencies. The Russian presence has somewhat mitigated the latter’s behaviour, but not knowing how long that engagement will last, people are anxious about the future” (ibid, p.i).

Business Monitor Online in March 2019 states that:

“The regime now controls Syria’s more economically developed regions, that is to say the coastal region, the capital Damascus, and Aleppo, while the opposition has been pushed back to rural areas. Meanwhile, Islamic State (IS) has also virtually lost all its territories, at the expense of the regime and of the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which are supported by the United States and which maintain a strong presence in the north of the country” (Business Monitor Online (8 March 2019) *Syria Long-Term Political Outlook*, p.1).

In March 2019 *International Crisis Group* states in a report that:

“Syria’s north-western governorate of Idlib and surrounding areas have avoided an all-out military assault...” (International Crisis Group (14 March 2019) *The Best of Bad Options for Syria’s Idlib*, p.2).

A report published by the *Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect* notes that:

“Idlib and adjoining portions of Aleppo and Hama governorates constitute the last remaining major opposition strongholds within Syria. Idlib was designated a "de-escalation zone" in 2017 and of the 3 million civilians living within the governorate, at least 1.5 million are internally displaced. On 17 September 2018 the governments of Turkey and Russia agreed to the establishment of a 15 kilometer-wide "demilitarized zone" within Idlib Governorate. Although opposition fighters removed all heavy weaponry from the designated area by 10 October, they did not entirely withdraw

their forces and fighting has escalated across the territory since the start of 2019” (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (15 March 2019) *Syria*, p.1).

In March 2019 the *Armed Conflict Location and Events Dataset* states in a report that:

“As the Syrian Civil War enters its eighth year, the country remains one of the deadliest places for civilians according to data collected by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). While overall conflict levels have steadily declined as the Bashar al-Assad regime has consolidated control over regained territory, ACLED has continued to record thousands of reported fatalities from direct attacks targeting civilians through the end of 2018, with nearly 500 reported so far this year. Regime forces have gradually intensified their bombardment of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) around the last rebel enclave in Idlib, violating the ceasefire agreement and reportedly killing a record number of civilians just last month” (Armed Conflict Location and Events Dataset (22 March 2019) *Even as Overall Violence Drops, Civilians Face Record Threats in Syria*).

Reuters in March 2019 states that:

“..., fighting around Damascus ended last year after a series of massive government offensives, reflecting a wider increase in state control around the country...” (Reuters (26 March 2019) *Film cameras start to roll again in Damascus studios*).

The *International Crisis Group* in March 2019 points out that:

“Turkey began patrols in Idlib in north west to help contain violence even as govt and Russia upped bombing there; Kurdish-led forces took Islamic State’s (ISIS) last holdout in east; and anti-govt protests erupted in Daraa in south. In north west, govt and Russian airstrikes 13-23 March killed 35 civilians and damaged Idlib prison, enabling dozens of ISIS and pro-govt prisoners to escape. Russian warplanes 10 March struck “White Helmets” first responders, killing two. Jihadist coalition Hei’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and other militants attacked govt forces in areas surrounding de-escalation zone. Turkey-backed rebels 9 March attacked govt positions in Hama governorate” (International Crisis Group (March 2019) *Crisiswatch March 2019*).

In April 2019 the *Syrian Human Rights Committee* states that the:

“...Syrian Human Rights Committee documented the death of 279 people in Syria during March 2019, of whom 73 children, 55 women and 28 people who were killed under torture” (Syrian Human Rights Committee (2 April 2019) *SHRC documents the death of 279 people in March*).

This publication also notes that:

“The province of Idlib came in the forefront in terms of the number of victims, where it reached (92) people, followed by the province of Deir ez-Zor (75) people, and then the province of Aleppo (37) people. The total number of victims in Hama province reached 26, 16 in al-Hasakeh, 15 in al-Raqqqa, 13 in Homs, 2 in each of Rif Dimashq and Daraa provinces, and 1 in the province of Latakia” (ibid).

In April 2019 the *Syrian Network for Human Rights* states in a report that the:

“...first half of March saw continuing military escalation by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces in the areas included by the Sochi Agreement, in particular the southern suburbs of Idlib and the northern and western suburbs of Hama” (Syrian Network for Human Rights (3 April 2019) *The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in March 2019*, p. 3).

In April 2019 *Reuters* states that:

“At least 15 people were reported killed on Sunday in shelling by government and insurgent forces in northwestern Syria, further straining a Russian-Turkish ceasefire deal for the region. The northwest is the last major foothold of insurgents opposed to President Bashar al-Assad, many of whom were forced to retreat there after military defeats at the hands of Syrian government forces backed by Iran and Russia” (Reuters (7 April 2019) *At least 15 reported killed as Syrian government, rebels exchange fire*).

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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