

CEHRI expresses solidarity with Syrians in historic opportunity to chart a new future for the country and calls on Austria to act in accordance with international obligations regarding asylum procedures

The ousting of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad following the seizure of power by opposition forces in the capital city of Damascus on 8 December 2024 marks an end to over five decades of brutality and repression under the rule of the Baath Party. This watershed moment in Syria's history presents a remarkable opportunity to end and redress decades of extreme human rights violations, including ["industrial scale" torture](#) and killing of detainees and [attacks with chemical weapons and barrel bombs](#).

Among Syrians, immense relief about the overthrow of the brutal regime mixes with uncertainty and fear of what is next. CEHRI expresses its hope for a committed break by the opposition forces from the impunity and repression of the past and a peaceful transition to a government that respects and ensures equal human rights for all Syrians, irrespective of religion, ethnicity or gender. CEHRI underlines the importance of centering Syrian voices in this transition and calls on Austria to support the victims of the Assad government's atrocities to secure justice and reparations for crimes under international law, including by launching universal jurisdiction cases against suspected perpetrators (see also [Amnesty International's call](#) to the same effect).

A day after the toppling of the regime, many European countries, including Austria, already announced a change of their asylum practices in light of these [developments](#), with Austria suspending pending asylum applications by Syrians and announcing to review asylum grants with the aim of revoking them and facilitating deportations. CEHRI recalls that while a review of granted asylum titles is envisaged in the Geneva Refugee Convention (see [Article 1 C](#)) and [Austrian law](#) in order to determine whether the situation in the country of origin has changed, decisions can only be taken on a case-by-case basis and require individual legal proceedings. Further, an assessment by courts of whether the circumstances that led to the granting of asylum or subsidiary protection have ceased to exist will only be possible when there is clarity about the further developments in Syria, as Austrian jurisprudence, in accordance with the Geneva Refugee Convention, requires [fundamental and durable changes](#) in the country of origin.

In light of the currently volatile situation in Syria, CEHRI joins [UNHCR](#), the [Council of Europe](#) and [Austrian NGOs](#) in emphasizing that states must carefully consider the rapidly changing and complex situation on the ground before any proceedings about revoking asylum or subsidiary protection can be launched and that the lodging of new asylum applications must still be facilitated. As it is still unclear which armed groups are in control of which areas and how they will be governing the territory under their control, it is currently impossible to make an evidence-based assessment. In addition, attacks in Syria by Israel, the US and Türkiye, as well as continued fighting involving armed groups risk further endangering civilians.

In this regard, CEHRI recalls that while Syria might temporarily be without a government, it has not lost its national sovereignty. CEHRI thus condemns in the strongest terms the use of armed force by Israel, Türkiye, and the US against the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Syria. These acts constitute a manifest violation of the *jus cogens* prohibition of the use of force and the prohibition of aggression. In the case of Israel seizing control the Golan Heights buffer zone and beyond, this constitutes a [violation of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement](#) and an illegal occupation. Any use of force and invasion of Syrian territory must immediately cease.