

Syria



Official name: The Syrian Arab Republic (al-Jumhuriya al-Arabiya al-Suriya).



Syria has formed the centre of many civilizations, from the Early Bronze Age kingdom of Ebla, a city with 15,000 inhabitants, to the Umayyad Empire with its capital in Damascus.

Modern Syria **became independent** in 1946. The Arab Socialist Baath Party has ruled Syria since 1963, with the support of the **armed forces** and intelligence services. The Constitution of the Republic offers broad powers to the President.

The capital of Syria is Damascus. Officially it is a unitary multiparty republic with one legislative house (People's Assembly). The country is situated on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, bordering (clockwise) **Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Israel, and Lebanon**. Its surface is 185,180 square kilometres. Syria's population was 20.8 million inhabitants (excluding refugees) in 2011 (**World Bank**). The country has no state religion, but the head of state must be a Muslim. The majority of the Syrians are Sunni Muslims, but there are several **minority groups**: Shiites, Druze, Alawites and several Christian denominations, of which the Greek Orthodox is the largest. The main language is Arabic, but other languages, such as Kurdish, Armenian and Aramaic, are also spoken. Syria's **economy** ranges among the lower middle income countries. Its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita is USD 2,790 (World Bank, 2010). Its monetary unit is the Syrian Pound (SP).

In mid-March 2011 the Syrian authorities faced **mass protests** as people demanded basic rights. These protests soon led to violent clashes with the Syrian security forces, and many protestors were killed or arrested. The uprising culminated in a large-scale conflict in which the **opposition** took up arms to defend itself against the government forces, leading to severe destruction and many

casualties. The conflict has increasingly attracted the **involvement of outside forces**, leading to growing sectarian tensions in the region. As of October 2015, more than 4 million Syrians had fled the country and the death toll since 2011 had passed 250,000.

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