



Ongoing Violence in Syria

Important information for Australian communities

Australia's position

The Australian Government deplores the violence and suffering that is occurring in Syria. Australians condemn all acts of violence against civilians, whoever is responsible.

The Government remains committed to an international response on Syria that accords with international law. Australia is continuing to work with like-minded countries to maintain pressure on the Syrian Government to stand down.

Australia implemented new sanctions against Syria on 21 August 2012 which restrict trade in precious metals and diamonds, luxury goods, and newly minted currency and with the oil and gas sector. This was in addition to asset freezes and travel bans on 106 individuals and 28 entities.

Australia's sanctions specifically target the regime, not the Syrian people—they include sanctions against senior government figures, including President Assad, who are connected with the violence and abuses of human rights.

Support for the Syrian people

Australia's direct assistance to those affected by the situation in Syria is focused on providing humanitarian relief through United Nations agencies and neutral non-government organisations. Australia is the third largest national donor. So far, Australia has provided more than \$20 million in humanitarian aid, including food, medicines, and emergency care for the thousands of families and children that have fled across Syria's borders.

The Australian Government also has a team on the ground in the region that is providing engineering, logistics and child protection services in the refugee camps on Syria's borders.

Australia has also increased its intake of refugees from Syria—an additional 1,000 refugees will now be able to be resettled in Australia as part of the Government's expanded Humanitarian Program for 2012-13.

The additional 1,000 refugees will include people still in Syria, as well as those who have fled to neighbouring countries.

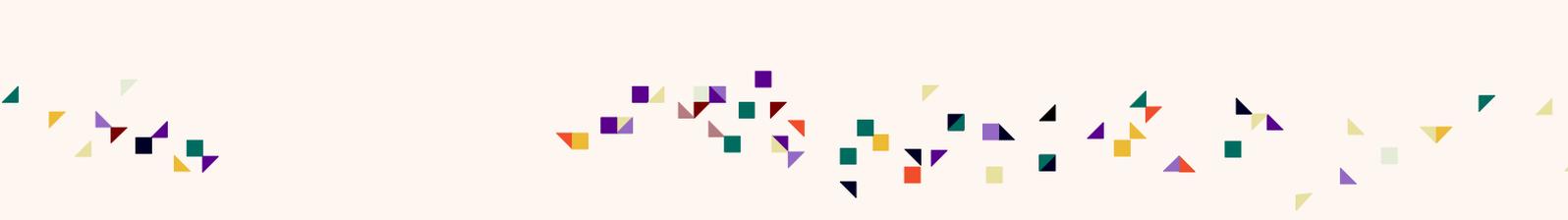
Further information about the situation in Syria and international humanitarian response efforts can be found at

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocusRel.asp?infocusID=146&Body=Syria&Body1=>

What can you do to help?

There are lots of ways people in Australia can help the people of Syria. You can:

- Make a donation to a United Nations agency or non-government organisation that is providing humanitarian assistance in and around Syria
- Participate and engage in peaceful legal protest activities
- Write to a Senator or Representative of the Federal Parliament—they are your representatives in the democratic process
- Use social media to voice your concerns and contribute to the challenge to the Syrian regime



What should you be aware of?

Australian Sanctions

It is illegal under Australian law for Australian citizens, including dual citizens, to provide any kind of support to any armed group in Syria.

This includes:

- Engaging in fighting for either side
- Funding, training or recruiting someone to fight
- Supplying or funding weapons for either side

The maximum penalty for an individual is 10 years' imprisonment or a heavy fine.

Similar sanctions apply to supporting conflict in other countries, including Lebanon, Somalia, Zimbabwe and Iraq.

If you want to donate funds to support civilians in Syria, you need to make sure you are donating to a legitimate organisation that does not contravene Australian law.

Further information about these sanctions can be found at http://www.dfat.gov.au/un/unsc_sanctions/syria_autonomous_sanctions.html

Using Social Media

Use social media responsibly.

You should not use social media to threaten or direct violence. It is illegal under Australian law to use social media in a way that would be reasonably regarded as menacing, harassing or offensive. The maximum penalty for an individual is three years' imprisonment.

It is also illegal to use social media to make threats to kill or cause serious harm to another person. The maximum penalty for an individual is 10 years' imprisonment.

Travel to Syria

The Australian Government strongly advises Australians not to travel to Syria at this time because of the extremely dangerous security situation, highlighted by ongoing military operations, presence of extremist groups, violent protests and terrorist attacks.

If you know an Australian that is currently in Syria you should encourage them to depart immediately by commercial means—while it is still possible to do so.

Australia does not have an embassy or consulate in Syria. The Government's capacity to provide assistance is therefore severely limited.

Further information about travel advisories can be found at <http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Syria>

A final message...

Despite the understandable frustrations Australians may feel at the ongoing violence in Syria, there is no justification for violence between groups here in Australia.

The Australian community condemns violence as a means of settling differences— it is illegal, will not help the situation in Syria and is detrimental to the vibrant, inclusive and culturally diverse nature of Australian society.

It is an offence to intentionally urge the use of force or violence by one group in the community against another group in the community on the basis of race, religion, nationality or political opinion. This law carries a maximum penalty of seven years' imprisonment.

It is also an offence to incite another person to commit an offence.

If you are the victim of violence or if you see any criminal activity, you need to report it to law enforcement agencies. These agencies are equipped to investigate and prosecute offenders in order to protect all Australians and maintain the rule of law within Australia.

Further information about reporting criminal activity can be found at <http://crimestoppers.com.au/> or by calling Crime Stoppers Australia on 1800 333 000.