

## 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 a unified international response on Syria. Australia is continuing to work with like-minded countries to maintain pressure on the Syrian Government to end the violence and commit to an inclusive process of political transition.

Australia implemented new sanctions against Syria on 21 August 2012, restricting trade in precious metals and diamonds, luxury goods, and newly minted currency and with the oil, gas and petrochemical sectors. These new measures are in addition to existing asset freezes and travel bans on 106 individuals and 28 entities and an embargo on the provision of military equipment and assistance.

Australia's sanctions specifically target the Syrian 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 has provided more than \$24 million in humanitarian aid to date, including food, medicines, and emergency care for thousands of families and children, including those 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.

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 responsibly 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 any person in Australia, or any Australian citizen, 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

Doing so could result in heavy fines or a maximum penalty for an individual of 10 years imprisonment.

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](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.smartraveller.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.