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Syria's Minorities Demand End to Centralised Rule, Call for Strong Constitutional Protections

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Syria's ethnic and religious minority groups are pressing for the dismantling of the country's centralised power structure, urging the creation of a decentralised political system and a constitution that guarantees pluralism and defends the rights of all communities.

The demands were made during a one-day conference in Hassakeh, a city in north-eastern Syria currently under the control of the Kurdish-led and United States-backed Syrian

Democratic Forces (SDF). Around 400 representatives from various minority groups, including Alawites, Druze, and Christians, gathered to push for lasting constitutional safeguards as the nation navigates its post-Assad transition.

Following the collapse of President Bashar al-Assad's regime in December, Syria is in a volatile period of political change, with national elections planned for September and a new constitution to be drafted in the coming years. However, this transition has been overshadowed by brutal violence targeting minorities, raising fears of continued instability and lawlessness.

Delegates at the conference condemned recent attacks carried out by pro-government gunmen, describing them as crimes against humanity. These assaults have claimed hundreds of lives since Assad's fall and have disproportionately affected minority communities.

Ghazal Ghazal, the spiritual leader of the Alawite community, said extremist forces in Syria were using religion to justify persecution and violence. He called for a decentralised or federal system that would protect the religious and cultural rights of every segment of Syrian society.

Elham Ahmad, a senior official in the autonomous administration of north-eastern Syria, said the event was a step towards building a state rooted in cultural and ethnic diversity. "This conference sends a message of civil peace and national reconciliation," she said.

Despite public assurances from interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa that all Syrians would be treated equally, violence has continued under his watch. Al-Sharaa, a former leader of al-Qaida's Syrian branch, has faced criticism for failing to curb attacks against vulnerable groups.

Hakemat Habib, one of the conference organisers, argued that decades of centralised rule and oppressive regimes have failed the people. He stressed that a democratic, decentralised state, agreed upon by all citizens, is the only viable path forward. "Syrian identity includes all Syrians," he said.

Druze spiritual leader Sheikh Hikmat Al-Hijri, whose fighters recently clashed with pro-government forces, addressed the conference via televised address, saying that "pluralism is not a threat but a treasure that strengthens unity."

Sipan Hamo, a senior SDF commander, also levelled strong criticism at the interim government, accusing it of continuing the same authoritarian practices that defined Syria for decades. He said the SDF is ready to integrate into a unified national army but claimed Damascus has shown no real intention to embrace a democratic framework.

The interim government in Damascus has so far remained silent on the conference's demands, avoiding direct engagement with calls for decentralisation and stronger constitutional protections.