

OFFICIAL NAME: Syrian Arab Republic

CAPITAL: Damascus

SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT: Unitary Multiparty Republic

AREA: 185,180 Sq Km (71,498 Sq Mi)

ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION: 16,696,500



LOCATION & GEOGRAPHY: Syria is located in the Middle East. It is bound by the Mediterranean Sea and Lebanon to the west, Israel and Jordan to the southwest, Iraq to the east and Turkey to the north. The country consists of four geographical regions. (1.) A narrow coastal plain that runs from the Turkish border to Lebanon. (2.) A series of mountains in the southwest which include the Jabal Ansariyeh or anti-Lebanon Range and the Jabal al-Shaykh which descends to the Hawran Plateau. (3.) A high plateau, east of the mountains, that slopes southeast and contains fertile regions. (4.) A barren desert region known as the Hamad which is located south of the high plateau and accounts for 33% of the land area. The principal rivers are the Euphrates and Orontes. Major Cities (pop. est.); Aleppo 1,591,400, Damascus 1,549,900, Homs 644,200, Latakia 306,500 (1994). Land Use; forested 45%, pastures 32%, agricultural-cultivated 3%, other 20% (1993)

CLIMATE: Syria has a Mediterranean climate on the coast characterized by hot dry summers and mild wet winters. The mountainous regions have moderate summers, although the interior plateaux have very hot summers and cold winters while the Hamad region has a true desert climate. The coolest month is January and the hottest are July and August. Average annual precipitation is 304 mm (12 inches) but varies from region to region. Average temperature ranges in Damascus are from 0 to 12 degrees Celsius (32 to 54 degrees Fahrenheit) in January to 18 to 37 degrees Celsius (65 to 99 degrees Fahrenheit) in August.

PEOPLE: The principal ethnic majority are the Arabs who account for around 89% of the population while the remainder consist of minority groups such as the Kurds, Armenians, Turkmens, Circassians and Assyrians.

DEMOGRAPHIC/VITAL STATISTICS: Density; 68 persons per sq km (175 persons per sq mi) (1991). Urban-Rural; 50.4% urban, 49.6% rural (1990). Sex Distribution; 51.1% male, 48.9% female (1990). Life Expectancy at Birth; 63.2 years male, 66.9 years female (1990). Age Breakdown; 49% under 15, 22% 15 to 29, 14% 30 to 44, 8% 45 to 59, 5% 60 to 74, 2% 75 and over (1990). Birth Rate; 44.6 per 1,000 (1990). Death Rate; 7.0 per 1,000 (1990). Increase Rate; 37.6 per 1,000 (1990). Infant Mortality Rate; 48.0 per 1,000 live births (1990).

RELIGIONS: The official religion is Islam which accounts for 90% of the population, of which 74% are Sunni Muslims while 16% are Alawaites, Ismailis or Shiite Muslims. Christians account for 9% of the population while the remainder are Druze.

LANGUAGES: The official language is Syrian Arabic which is spoken by the majority of the population. Other minority languages include Kurdish, Armenian, Syriac and Turkic. Additionally, English is coming into increasing use.

EDUCATION: Aged 10 or over and having attained: no formal schooling 32.0%, literacy skills 28.4%, primary 31.3%, secondary 4.9%, higher 3.9% (1984). Literacy; literate population aged 15 or over 64.5% (1990).

MODERN HISTORY - WWII TO 1993: In 1946 Syria gained complete independence from France and in Dec. 1949 the military took control of the government. A new constitution was adopted which established Islamic law and that the President of Syria must be a Muslim. In 1953 the Arab Socialist Party and the Arab Resistance Party merged to form the Arab Socialist Resurrection Party or Baath Party. In 1958 Syria and Egypt joined to form the United Arab Republic (UAR), although Syria withdrew three years later. In 1963 a Baathist backed Junta overthrew the government. In 1967 Syria clashed with Israel and began the Six Day War, resulting in a victory for Israel over Syria, Egypt and Jordan. On Nov. 1970 the Baathist military wing led by Lt.-Gen. Hafez al-Assad seized control of the government. On Oct. 6, 1973 Syria and Egypt launched a surprise attack on Israel which resulted in a Soviet-mediated cease-fire on Oct. 24. In Apr. 1976 Syria sent troops to Lebanon at the Lebanese President's request in an effort to halt their civil war and since 1979 peace-keeping forces in Lebanon have been made up entirely of Syrian troops. During the 1980's Syria assisted the Lebanese Muslims in their conflict with the Christians while tensions between Syria and Israel also continued through the 1980's. In Dec. 1983 Syrian troops fired at US reconnaissance planes as they flew over Syrian occupied territory which resulted in the death of one US pilot while another was captured and later released in 1984. After Iraq invaded Kuwait in Aug. 1990 Syria pledged its alliance and troops to the US-led coalition forces which forcibly removed Iraq in Jan. 1991. On Mar. 6, 1991 government representatives of Syria, Egypt and the six GCC countries signed an agreement, the Damascus Declaration, to establish a substantial Arab regional security force following the Gulf War. In May 1991 Syria and Lebanon agreed to a special cooperation pact. In July 1991 Pres. al-Assad agreed to participate in direct talks with Israel during regional Middle East peace talks but insisted that Israel should halt construction in the occupied territories before the talks could take place. In the same month the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development approved a US \$60.5 million loan for the Idleb textile factory. On Dec. 2, 1991 a referendum overwhelmingly voted in favor of Pres. al-Assad remaining in office for his fourth consecutive seven-year term. In Jan. 1992 Syria boycotted Middle East peace talks in Moscow. On March 12, 1992 Pres. al-Assad was inaugurated for his fourth presidential term

and vowed to continue with the government's political and economic reforms. In April 1992 Syria removed travel restrictions on Syrian Jews and assisted Turkey in opposing Kurdish guerrilla operations. In July 1992 the government announced that Syrian Jews would no longer have the Arabic term Moussawi stamped on their identity cards. In Sept. 1992 Syrian representatives attended Middle East peace talks in Washington, D.C and reiterated their commitment to total peace with Israel. Also in 1992 Syria concluded a US \$2 billion weapons cooperation agreement with Russia for the supply of a number of Sukhoi and MiG fighters, tanks and antimissile systems. In 1993 Syria agreed to help trace seven missing Israeli soldiers in Lebanon from the 1980's with the US responding by announcing it would relax sanctions against the country. In Feb. 1993 the European Parliament blocked the EU's financial assistance package of ECU 148 million citing Syria's human rights record. In May 20 , 1993 following meetings with the signatories of the Damascus Declaration it was agreed that the objective of regional cooperation would shift from mutual defense to economic assistance. In July 1993 a meeting of the Arab Boycott of Israel held in Damascus announced a ban on the former Yugoslavia as well as a Bulgarian company. In Aug. 1993 Syria and Lebanon formally agreed to establish a permanent secretariat for the Higher Council that was established in May 1991 following their cooperation pact. Also in 1993 Syria and Iran agreed to a timetable for the establishment of a joint agreement on shared water resources.

CURRENCY: The official currency is the Pound (LS) divided into 100 Piastres.

ECONOMY: Gross National Product; USD \$16,204,000,000 (1991). Public Debt; USD \$16,234,000,000 (1993). Imports; LS 46,468,900,000 (1993). Exports; LS 35,318,000,000 (1993). Tourism Receipts; USD \$700,000,000 (1993). Balance of Trade; LS -7,312,000,000 (1993). Economically Active Population; 3,845,400 or 27.8% of total population (1991). Unemployed; 6.1% (1991).

MAIN TRADING PARTNERS: Its main trading partners are Saudi Arabia, Germany, Italy, France, Romania, the USA and the former USSR.

MAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTS: Barley, Cattle, Cotton, Crude Asphalt, Crude Oil, Fruit, Goats, Manganese, Natural Gas, Phosphates, Potatoes, Salt, Sheep, Sugar, Vegetables, Wheat.

MAJOR INDUSTRIES: Agriculture, Cement, Flour, Glass, Leather Goods, Metal Goods, Oil and Gas Production and Refining, Soap, Textiles.

MAIN EXPORTS: Barley, Cotton, Fruit, Natural Gas, Oil Products, Vegetables, Wheat, Wool.

TRANSPORT: Railroads; route length 1,771 km (1,100 mi) (1989), passenger-km 1,116,000,000 (693,000,000 passenger-mi) (1989), cargo ton-km 1,356,000,000

(929,000,000 short ton-mi) (1989). Roads; length 29,732 km (18,475 mi) (1989). Vehicles; cars 117,570 (1989), trucks and buses 138,063 (1989). Merchant Marine; vessels 68 (1990), deadweight tonnage 115,524 (1990). Air Transport; passenger-km 1,105,000,000 (687,000,000 passenger-mi) (1990), cargo ton-km 17,570,000 (12,034,000 short ton-mi) (1990).

COMMUNICATIONS: Daily Newspapers; total of 11 with a total circulation of 290,000 (1992). Radio; receivers 3,000,000 (1993). Television; receivers 700,000 (1993). Telephones; units 550,312 (1993).

MILITARY: 423,000 (1995) total active duty personnel with 74.5% army, 1.9% navy and 23.6% air force while military expenditure accounts for 8.3% (1993) of the Gross National Product (GNP).