

BACKGROUND:

Syria is a republic ruled by the authoritarian regime of President Bashar Assad. The president makes key decisions with counsel from a small number of security advisors, ministers, and senior members of the ruling Baath (Arab Socialist Renaissance) Party.

The civil war started in 2012. The regime maintained control over the southern coastal governorates. Fragmented opposition groups maintained control in several northern and central areas, in many cases establishing new or reconstituted governance structures, including irregularly constituted courts. The regime regularly attacked areas under opposition control. Government-controlled regular security forces and irregular militias associated with the government committed widespread human rights abuses.

The Assad regime continued to use indiscriminate and deadly force to quell protests and conducted air and ground-based military assaults on cities, residential areas, and civilian infrastructures, including schools and hospitals throughout the country. The regime blocked access for humanitarian assistance to reach civilian areas, particularly areas held by opposition groups.

The most egregious human rights problems were the regime's widespread and systematic attacks against civilians; systematic and widespread use of torture; and the perpetuation of massacres, forced displacement, and starvation.

Impunity was pervasive and deeply embedded, as the government did not attempt to punish, arrest, or prosecute officials who violated human rights. The regime often sheltered those in its ranks who committed human rights abuses.

Some armed extremist groups also engaged in abuses, including massacres, bombings, and kidnapping; unlawful detention, torture, and summary execution of security force members, government supporters, pro-government militia members, minorities, religious figures, activists, journalists, and humanitarian aid workers; and forced evacuations from homes based on sectarian identity. As the conflict continues, many former members of the regime have defected and joined opposition groups and armed militias. With the on-going expansion of DOS programs in the region, concerns have been raised regarding the possibility of the USG inadvertently funding individuals guilty of human rights abuses. The data

points we plan to add to the information collection are necessary to help identify the former affiliations of these individuals. The collection of the additional information is limited to former Syrian civilian government and military officials and members of the opposition and armed militias and will appear on the DS-4184 under a heading of **Syria Citizen Use Only**.

The additional data points are:

- Location of Current Unit (Province, City/Municipality/Town, neighborhood, facility and station, Country)
- Description of duties in opposition organization
- Date joined opposition organization
- Previous profession (for those who never served in the Syrian government, aside from compulsory military service)

Additional data required for Defected Regime Personnel only:

- Previous SARG Ministry and Unit
- Previous position (rank/title)
- Description of duties
- Time served (MM/YYYY to MM/YYYY)
- Location of previous Unit (Province, City/Municipality/Town, neighborhood, facility and station, Country)

RAM published Federal Register notices to solicit public comments for the PRA extension on January 28, 2015 and April 23, 2015. The Syria program and its requirements continue to evolve as the situation on the ground changes. Additionally, DOS continues to consolidate CT vetting and information collection in the RAM office. Centralizing CT vetting adds efficiency and economies to vetting and consistency for our internal and external customers. Adding the collection of this vital human rights information to the data currently being collected for the Syria program will provide DOS personnel in the field critical information about defectors prior to providing USG funding or training.