

Joint Statement by Ministers Baird and Ablonczy on the Situation in Syria

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(No. 376 - December 15, 2011 - 9 a.m. ET) Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird and the Honourable Diane Ablonczy, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), today issued the following statement regarding Syria:

“The situation in Syria continues to deteriorate. With additional sanctions imposed by the Arab League reducing flights out of Damascus taking effect today, there may soon be fewer options for Canadians in Syria to leave safely.

“Our best advice is to leave Syria immediately, by any available means and while options exist. To help, we have directed officials to undertake a voluntary evacuation over the next month. Essentially, this will open an express lane across government departments to help Canadians obtain the documentation they need to leave Syria.

“As the security situation evolves, embassy services may be reduced without warning. We therefore urge Canadian citizens, their spouses and dependent children to apply for travel documents, and leave Syria immediately.”

A backgrounder detailing the actions of our voluntary evacuation follows.

Canadian citizens in Syria requiring consular assistance should contact the Canadian Embassy in Damascus at 963 (11) 611-6692, 611-6851, or 611-6870, or call Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada’s Emergency Operations Centre collect at 613-944-2471. An email can also be sent to sos@international.gc.ca.

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A backgrounder follows.

For further information, media representatives may contact:

Foreign Affairs Media Relations Office
Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada
613-995-1874
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Backgrounder - Security Situation in Syria

The situation in Syria is deteriorating. Civil unrest and demonstrations have been occurring in many Syrian cities since March 2011. There has been extensive use of force by the security forces and military in suppressing demonstrations across the country. Many casualties and fatalities have been reported, and protests and violent repression are likely to continue. Security operations have involved the complete lock-down of entire towns for

periods varying from a few days to a few weeks. This may take place with little warning. The situation in Syria remains very dynamic and difficult to predict. The current instability and violence may go on for some time.

Advice to Canadians

Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (DFAIT)'s Travel Report for Syria has been encouraging Canadians to leave Syria since April 23, 2011. It has been advising "Canadians in Syria [to] leave now by commercial means while these are still available" since October 14, 2011. In published statements, Minister Baird has been reiterating this advice to Canadians in Syria since November 16.

Canadians remaining in Syria should leave now by commercial means while these are still available. Sanctions on the Syrian government by the Arab League are expected to result in the suspension of 50 percent of commercial flights. Canadians who remain in the country despite this warning should be aware that the Government of Canada's ability to provide consular assistance may be extremely limited due to the security situation and restrictions imposed by the Syrian government. We strongly recommend that Canadians register with the [Registration of Canadians Abroad service](#). About 1,500 Canadians are registered in Syria. We estimate approximately 5,000 Canadians are currently in Syria.

Voluntary evacuation

The Government of Canada is mobilizing its resources in Canada and in the region to ensure those Canadians who want to leave Syria can do so while they are still able.

The Canadian Embassy in Damascus will assist Canadians in Syria, their spouses and dependent children to obtain the necessary travel documents and visas to come to Canada between now and the middle of January 2012, and will work closely with partner departments to process these as quickly as possible. All normal visa requirements, including admissibility and fees, remain in place. If the situation continues to deteriorate, the embassy services may be reduced without warning.

Specifically:

- DFAIT is mobilizing extra resources to reach out to Canadians in Syria to reiterate our advice for Canadians to leave now while commercial means are available, and to strongly recommend to those Canadians currently residing in Syria that they update their travel documentation and those of their immediate dependants;
- DFAIT is providing consular assistance as required, including specialized services;
- Passport Canada will process regular applications in seven days and emergency travel documents in 48 hours; and
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada will work closely with the Canada Border Services Agency to process the vast majority of visa applications for non-Canadian spouses and dependent children of Canadian citizens in five calendar days.

Read the [Arabic version](#) of this document.

