

# Turkey's Syrians rejoice over Assad's fall

AFP- Hundreds of Syrians celebrated the fall of long-time ruler Bashar al-Assad in joyous scenes on Sunday outside the Fatih Mosque in central Istanbul, one of the focal points for their 500,000-strong Syrian community in the Turkish city.

Turkey has become home for millions of Syrians who fled since civil war erupted in their home nation in 2011.

"I didn't expect it to happen one day, not even in three centuries. No one was expecting this. This is a huge victory for us," said Mohamad Cuma, a student who arrived from the northern Syrian city of Aleppo three years ago.

"It's incredible. It's like we've been born again," said Sawsan al-Ahmad, holding her young son by the hand.

Ahmad lived through the first few months of the siege of the strategic city of Homs.

She said she was delighted to be able to take her son to her "home soil", now that Assad has fallen after a lightning offensive by Islamist-led rebels.

Rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and allied factions seized swathes of Syria from government hands, including the cities of Aleppo, Hama and Homs in an offensive that started November 27.

Early on Sunday they entered the capital, Damascus, declaring the demise of an Assad dynasty that had ruled Syria with an iron fist for five decades.

Behind Ahmad, hundreds of Syrians chanted "Allahu akhbar" ("God is greatest").

Some waved Syrian opposition flags and called for Assad to be executed.

In the middle of the jubilant throng, whose chanting could be heard hundreds of metres (yards) away, a man waved a portrait of Abdel-Basset al-Sarout, a former Syrian football star who became a rebel fighter and was killed in 2019 in clashes with Assad's forces.

– 'He'll end up in hell' –

"Today is a day of huge celebration for us Syrians," said 42-year-old Ibrahim al-Mohamed, one of the three million Syrian refugees living in neighbouring Turkey.

"My son became handicapped because of Assad," he said, his eyes red and his voice cracking with emotion.

"We were living in Aleppo and a bomb was dropped on the building next door. My son was traumatised. He lost the ability to speak. He's 13 now and just starting to get a little bit better."

"God be praised. We're rid of Assad," said Ahmed Mohamad, a teacher of the Koran who came to Turkey from Aleppo 11 years ago after defecting from the Syrian army.

"If God wills, he'll be decapitated," added an onlooker, drawing his thumb across his throat.

Cuma said he didn't care what became of Assad.

"It's enough that he's gone," he said.

"He can go to live in Russia, in Belarus, in Venezuela, wherever the hell he wants to go. Let him go because he's going to end up in hell."

Cuma said he expected the whole of Syria would "be unified under one flag" and predicted 50 percent of Syrian refugees in

Turkey would return home.

He said the reported fall of the Assad regime had altered his personal plans.

“Well, my plan before this week was to pursue a Masters (degree) in the UK,” explained the civil engineering student at Istanbul’s prestigious Bogazici University.

“But now I think I could be a benefit for Syria’s future and reconstruction. So most probably I’ll go back.”

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