# Activist Mahmoud Hassino's warning on the future of gay rights in post-Assad Syria



In a recent interview conducted via Zoom from his residence in Berlin, Mahmoud Hassino, an award-winning journalist and LGBTQ+ rights activist, delved into the evolving political landscape of Syria following the ouster of dictator Bashar Al-Assad. The 49-year-old, who became a German citizen in 2022, has a rich history of advocating for LGBTQ+ rights, having previously founded Mawaleh, an LGBTQ+-themed magazine, and Mazaj, a gay travel website tailored to Syrian audiences. Hassino also played a pivotal role in the 2017 film "Mr. Gay Syria." He previously shared insights with Gay City News at the onset of Syria's civil unrest.

In the discussion, Hassino illuminated the complexities surrounding the recent change in Syria's governance, particularly the rise of the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir Al Sham. Led by Ahmed al-Sharaa, or Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, the group is attempting to position itself as a moderate force, both to the international community and to the Syrian populace. He expressed his concerns about the implications of this shift for LGBTQ+ individuals in Syria, especially considering the rise of religious extremism in a post-Assad landscape.

“When Bashar left, I was really happy,” Hassino reflected, indicating the unexpected nature of the regime's collapse. However, he cautioned that the emergence of Hayat Tahrir Al Sham could bring about a new set of challenges reminiscent of the persecution faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in Iraq following the fall of Saddam Hussein. “I really don’t want what happened in Iraq to happen in Syria,” he emphasised.

Hassino's dialogue also touched on the troubling trend of Western governments normalising relations with the Assad regime in order to manage the influx of refugees. “Everything was going towards a rehabilitation of Assad, normalizing things because the right wing, they don’t want more refugees in Europe,” he said, highlighting the political motivations that could endanger vulnerable populations.

Despite the geographic distance from Syria, Hassino's emotional connection to his homeland remains strong. He expressed a deep nostalgia for Aleppo, where he spent twelve years of his life. “I do miss the streets of Aleppo,” he admitted, although he has come to terms with the destruction wrought by war. His reflections included longing to return to the coastal views of Syria, even as he acknowledged the challenges his activism presents in terms of personal safety.

While he yearns for a time when he could freely express his identity in Syria, he is keenly aware of the dangers that remain. His efforts, whether through writing or film, aim to highlight the resilience of LGBTQ+ people in Syria. “We Syrians are resilient,” he stated, also sharing an anecdote about spirited demonstrations in Berlin where LGBTQ+ Syrians celebrated their identities, a stark contrast to the harsh realities faced by many in their homeland.

As he concluded the conversation, Hassino underscored the importance of acknowledging the joy and life that continues to thrive among LGBTQ+ Syrians, despite the dire circumstances. “We managed to grab it somehow,” he noted about the ability of queer individuals to find joy amid oppression. This sentiment reflects not only a deep connection to his cultural roots but also an unwavering spirit of hope for the future of LGBTQ+ rights in Syria, maintaining that “with or without Al Jolani, Syria will be the gayest place in the world.”

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/implications-of-assads-fall-for-syria-and-the-region/> - Corroborates the complexities of the transition from authoritarian rule in Syria and the need for a clear plan for a stable system after Assad's fall.
* <https://timep.org/2024/12/19/a-post-assad-syria-navigating-the-transition-ahead/> - Provides details on the current power dynamics in post-Assad Syria, including the rise of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and the fragmented landscape of territorial control.
* <https://timep.org/2024/12/19/a-post-assad-syria-navigating-the-transition-ahead/> - Explains the formation of the interim government by HTS, the suspension of the former regime’s parliament, and the controversial suspension of the constitution for amendments.
* <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-assad-regime-falls-what-happens-now/> - Discusses the implications of Assad's defeat, including the strategic defeat of Russia and Iran, and the potential for Turkey to gain influence in the region.
* <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-assad-regime-falls-what-happens-now/> - Highlights the challenges of domestic power-sharing and the need for equitable governance and security in Syria, as well as the potential reverberations for other conflicts in the region.
* <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/implications-of-assads-fall-for-syria-and-the-region/> - Mentions the importance of maintaining order and open channels of communication during the transition period in Syria.
* <https://timep.org/2024/12/19/a-post-assad-syria-navigating-the-transition-ahead/> - Details the efforts of HTS to centralize control over security and military factions in former regime-held territories and the establishment of reconciliation centers.
* <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-assad-regime-falls-what-happens-now/> - Addresses the concerns about the rise of religious extremism in a post-Assad Syria and its potential impact on vulnerable populations, including LGBTQ+ individuals.
* <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/implications-of-assads-fall-for-syria-and-the-region/> - Corroborates the need for a new constitution and the organization of elections for a constituent assembly in the transition process.