

# Five Media Activists Killed and Five Arrested, Toll of May 2017

The Syrian Regime is still  
Killing Media Activists Despite  
the De-Escalation Agreement

# SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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The Syrian Network for Human Rights, founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, non-profit independent organization that is a primary source for the United Nations on all death toll-related statistics in Syria



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### I. Introduction

Media activism in Syria is continuously deteriorating in light of the lack of attention by many international media organizations to what is happening in Syria and the notable decline in media coverage over the last year compared with previous years.

SNHR publishes a monthly report documenting the violations against media activists who play a prominent role in the civil movement and the armed conflict.

It should be noted that a journalist is a civilian according to the international humanitarian law regardless of his nationality. Any attack deliberately directed against a journalist is considered a war crime. However, when a media activist gets close to action-heavy zones, he is responsible for his own actions where targeting him in such case would be seen as collateral damage. Also, he would lose the right to protection if he was involved in military operations. We believe that media activists must be respected whether they have identification papers as media workers or don't considering the many difficulties they encounter to acquire these papers.

#### **Fadel Abdul Ghany, chairman of SNHR, says:**

“Media activism is especially important because it often sheds light on a string of various crimes that are taking place on a daily basis. Therefore, we record the violations perpetrated by conflicting parties in our monthly reports on violations against media activists.”



The fourth round of negotiations was held in Astana city, Kazakhstan's capital, on 3 and 4 of May 2017. Russian, Turkish, and Iranian representatives attended as the sponsoring states of Ankara Ceasefire Agreement. The three states agreed on establishing four de-escalation zones, wherein the agreement is to commence on May 6, 2017. The agreement outlined four major de-escalation areas – Idlib governorate and the surrounding areas (parts of Aleppo, Hama, and Latakia governorates), northern Homs governorate, Eastern Ghouta, and parts of Daraa and al Quneitra governorates in the southern parts of Syria. It was provided that an expert committee would accurately assign the borders of said zones at a later date. The agreement provided for a cessation of combat operations, passage of humanitarian aids, and for IDPs to go back to their areas. Since the agreement went into effect, these areas saw a relatively noticeable and good decrease in killing rates compared with the previous months since March 2011.

Nonetheless, breaches didn't stop, mainly by the Syrian regime, who is seemingly the party that would be most affected should the ceasefire go on, and in particular extrajudicial killing crimes and, more horrendously, deaths due to torture. This strongly asserts that there is a ceasefire of some sort on the table, but the crimes that the international community -especially the Russian, Turkish, and Iranian sponsors- won't see are still going on as nothing has changed.

No drop in the rates of media activists killed by Syrian regime forces have been recorded following the commencement of the de-escalation agreement. Even more, Even more, these numbers exceeded in May what we have recorded in past months before the agreement, and was three times what was recorded in April.

SNHR emphasizes that serious and quick steps must be taken to save media activism in Syria, and renews its condemnation of all violations against the freedom of media activism regardless of the perpetrators. The freedom of media must be respected and the workers in the media field must be protected and particularly considered. All individuals involved in violations against journalists and media activists must be held accountable. The international community, represented by the Security Council, must act upon its responsibilities in order to protect civilians and media activists in Syria.



## II. Methodology

According to SNHR's methodology, a civilian journalist is anyone who plays a notable role in reporting and publishing news. He is not necessarily impartial as a journalist should be.

In case a civilian journalist carried a weapon and was directly engaged in offensive military operations, he is no longer deemed a citizen journalist whereas it is possible that he would be referred to as a civilian journalist again provided he retires completely from military action.

The report might include incidents that we believe do not constitute violations of the international humanitarian law. We include it, however, to record it among the incidents that resulted in casualties even though it was within the boundaries that the international humanitarian law allows for.

This report draws upon SNHR's archive and the investigations conducted by the Network in addition to accounts by victims' families, information from local activists, and analyzing the pictures and videos that we have been receiving and archiving in our records since 2011.

to read more about SNHR [methodology](#) in documenting victims:

In light of the security and logistic difficulties to access all the areas where violations take place, it is worth noting that these statistics and incidents are only the bare minimum of the actual magnitude of crimes and violations that happened.

## III. Executive Summary

Violations against media activists during the month of May 2017 are distributed as follows:

A. Acts of killing: SNHR documented the killing of five media activists as follows:

- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): three media activists
- Armed opposition factions: two media activists

B. Arrest, abduction, and release: we recorded nine cases, as follows:

- Extremist Islamic groups:

Fateh al Sham Front (formerly al Nusra Front): we recorded three arrest cases, where the arrested media activists were released later.

- Armed opposition factions: we recorded one case, where the arrested media activist was released later.

- Self-Management forces (consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party): we recorded one arrest case



## IV. Details

### **A. Violations by Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias)**

- Acts of killing

#### **Mohammad Adnan Habib**

Sunday, May 7, 2017, Syrian regime-supporting media outlets published a [video](#) and a number of pictures showing Mohammad after he fell into an ambush that was set up on the same day for Jaish al Naser, an armed opposition faction, as Mohammad was with them covering clashes with Syrian regime forces on al “Zalaqeyat checkpoint” battlefield in northern suburbs of Hama governorate. [One of the pictures](#) showed his dead body. As of this writing, we have not been able to determine the way by which Mohammad was killed. Mohammad, [a photographer](#) for Jaish al Naser, an armed opposition faction, from Termalla in southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in 1999, has an intermediate education certificate, single.

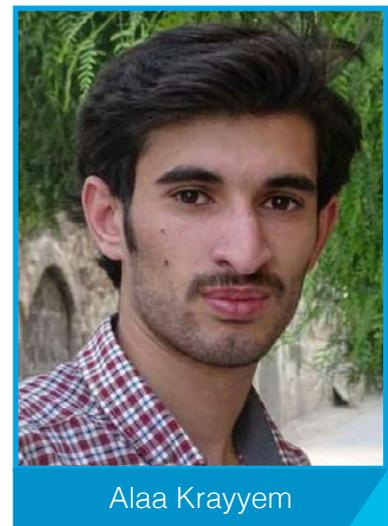
SNHR contacted, via WhatsApp, the media activist Mohammad Rashid, a friend of Mohammad Habib, who told us:

“While Mohammad was on “al Zalaqeyat checkpoint” covering the clashes between the rebels and the regime, he fell into an ambush, along with a number of fighters, set by the regime. They were arrested and shot dead on the same day according to the pictures broadcasted by pages supporting the regime. Mohammad and five of Jaish al Naser fighters were killed.”

#### **Alaa Krayyem**

Thursday, May 4, 2017, Alaa [died](#) of a fatal injury in his right lung caused by a tank shell that fell by Syrian regime forces tanks, as it landed near him while he was covering clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions on “Damascus-Homs highway” checkpoint in al Qaboun neighborhood in eastern Damascus city.

Alaa, known as Mohammad al Qabouni, [a reporter](#) for the media office of al Qaboun neighborhood, the Media Office of the Syrian Revolution Force, and the Syrian Media Commission, from al Qaboun neighborhood, Damascus city, born in 1995, has an intermediate education certificate, married and a father of a child.



SNHR contacted, via Facebook, the media activist Udai Ouda, a friend of Alaa's, who told us:

“While Alaa was covering the clashes between Syrian regime forces and opposition factions on “Damascus-Homs highway” battlefield in [al Qaboun neighborhood](#), a shell fired by Syrian regime forces landed near him. The shrapnel got into his right lung, and he died. Seven armed opposition fighters were killed in that incident, and five others were wounded.”

### **Osama Khaled al Habbali**

Tuesday, May 23, 2017, we received information confirming that Osama died due to torture in Sydnaya Prison. It should be noted that the Military Security forces, affiliated to Syrian regime forces, arrested him on Saturday, August 18, 2012, in al Dabbousiya area in suburbs of Homs on the Syrian-Lebanese borders, as he was coming back from a treatment trip after a previous injury.

Osama, [an independent media activist](#), from al Khaldiya neighborhood, Homs city, born in 1988, has an intermediate education certificate, single.



Osama al Habbali

Mrs. Sawsan al Habbali, Osama's sister, told SNHR, via Facebook, about her brother's death:

“My brother was arrested by the Military Security on August 18, 2012, on the Syrian-Lebanese borders as he was coming back from Lebanon where he was receiving treatment. In early-2017, they told me, through an item on a survey regarding detainees in al Wa'er neighborhood negotiations, that my brother is dead according to lists provided by the regime. I didn't believe it and hid the news from everyone. In early-May, I hired a lawyer to inquire for us about my brother, if he was alive and whether we could transfer him to Adra Prison. He told me that he was executed in March 2015 following a “show field-trial” on charges of terrorist acts that led to the death of a person. Everyone knows that my brother was a peaceful activist who never bore arms.”



## **B. Violations by extremist Islamic groups**

### **• Fateh al Sham Front**

#### Arrest and release

#### **Baraa al Jesri**

Sunday, April 23, 2017, he was arrested by Fateh al Sham fighters (fighters from Turkistan) who confiscated his belongings (motorbike, camera, a wireless talking device) at a checkpoint in Jesr al Shoghour city over accusations of taking pictures of factions bases without a photography permit. He was released on the next day. It wasn't until Sunday, May 7, 2017, that Baraa revealed that he was arrested for safety concerns and after he took back all of his belongings.

Baraa, a reporter for Idlib Media Office in Jesr al Shoghour city, from Jesr al Shoghour city in suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in 1996.



Baraa al Jesri

#### **Ghiath al Rajab**

Thursday, May 4, 2017, he was arrested by Fateh al Sham Front fighters after he was summoned to one of their detention centers in Idlib governorate. He was released on Sunday, May 14, 2017.

Ghiath, a reporter for Helfaya Media Office, from Helfaya city, northern suburbs of Hama.



Ghiath al Rajab



## **Mnahi al Ahmad**

Wednesday, May 24, 2017, he was arrested by Fateh al Sham Front from Arafa village in eastern suburbs of Hama over a [post online](#) in which he criticized using guns and bombs by the Front fighters in a wedding. He was released on the next day.

Mnahi, an independent media activist, from Arafa village, 26-year-old.



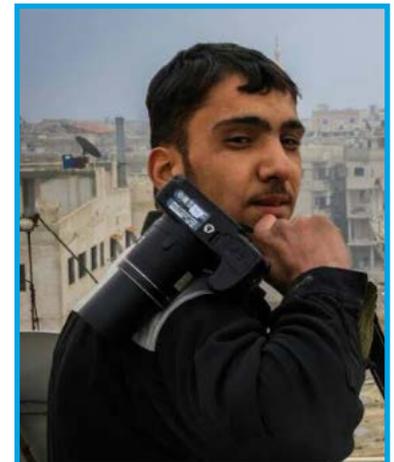
Mnahi al Ahmad

## **C. Armed opposition factions**

### **- Acts of killing**

#### **Feras Ma'moun Manwar**

Monday, May 1, 2017, he was shot by Jaish al Islam, an armed opposition faction, in the right eye, hand, and right foot as he was taking his family from his place of residence to a place far from the clashes between Failaq al Rahman and Hay'et Fateh al Sham, on one side, and Jaish al Islam, on the other side, on the outskirts of Zamalka city in eastern suburbs of Damascus governorate. The city is under the control of armed opposition factions. Feras, a photographer for Failaq al Rahman, an armed opposition faction, from Zamalka city, born in 1994, has an elementary education certificate, married.



Feras Manwar

#### **Yasser al Bwydani**

Monday morning, May 15, 2017, he [was killed](#) by Failaq al Rahman -an armed opposition faction- and Hay'et Fateh al Sham fighters as he was covering the infighting with Jaish al Islam -an armed opposition faction- in al Ash'ari town, in Eastern Ghouta, east of Damascus suburbs governorate. The town is under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Fateh al Sham Front.

Yasser, [a photographer](#) for Jaish al Islam, from [Douma city](#) -in Eastern Ghouta- east of Damascus suburbs governorate, 20-year-old, single.



Yasser al Bwydani



## **Arrest and release**

### **Zakariya Mahmoud Attya**

Wednesday, May 24, 2017, he was arrested by “Ahrar al Sham Islamic Movement” fighters from a camp in Sarma-da city in suburbs of Idlib governorate, over accusations of forging a university degree from the faculty of Shariaa. He was released on Sunday, May 28, 2017.

Zakariya, [an independent media activist](#), from al Hwas village, Sahl al Ghab, suburbs of Hama governorate, born in 1987.



Zakariya Attya

## **D. Violations by Self-Management forces (consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers’ Party)**

### **Arrest**

### **Barzan Hussein**

Saturday, May 13, 2017, he was arrested by Self-Management forces (Consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party, a branch for the Kurdistan Workers’ Party) in al Rmilan city, eastern suburbs of al Hasaka governorate. He was taken to an undisclosed location. As of this writing, His fate is still unknown to SNHR as well as his family.

Barzan, [reporter for Ark](#), a TV program aired on Zagros TV channel, from al Rmilan city.



Barzan Hussein



## V. Recommendations

### **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**

Condemn the targeting of media activists in Syria and sheds light on their sacrifice and suffering.

### **Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic**

Conduct investigations that focuses on the targeting of media activists given their vital role in recording incidents in Syria.

### **The Security Council**

Work on fighting the policy of impunity by referring the cases in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

### **International and Arabic media institutions**

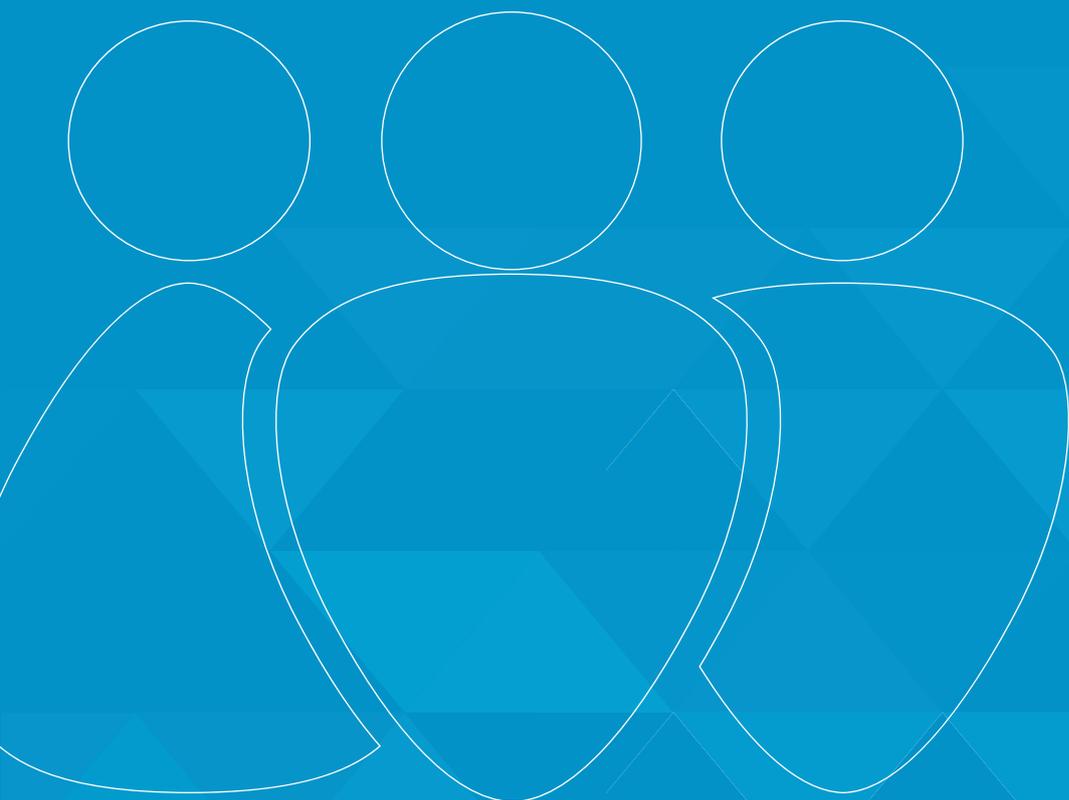
Advocate their colleagues in the field of media by publishing periodic reports that shed light on their daily suffering and memorialize their sacrifice. Also, they must contact their families to console them.

Finally, all parties have to respect the international humanitarian law with respect to the protection of civilians and especially media activists and their equipment.

## Acknowledgment and Condolences

Out most heartfelt condolences go out for the victims' families and our thank for the families and friends of media activists who contributed effectively to this report.





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