

In the Depth of the Abyss

463 media activist killed, 1027 others arrested and kidnapped



Report Contents:

- Introduction	3
- Report methodology	5
- Executive Summary	6
- Report Details	6
1. Government forces (army, security, local militias, foreign militias).....	6
2. Kurdish Democratic Union forces	10
3. Extremist Groups	11
4. Armed Opposition Factions	14
5. Unidentified Groups	15
- Recommendations	16





A- Introduction

As the popular protests began in March 2011 the Syrian authorities realized the crucial role of the media in exposing their crimes and violations and in delivering the people's main demands, so they fought it with everything they have, and completely blocked the Arabian and international media so then the local activists headed to alternative media through modern technology and through social networks as they started with simple cell phones cameras, as time passed and the movement developed they developed their tools and their form and ways of handling the events and covering it improved clearly and as websites specialized in transporting news and media appeared, also newspapers and news radio stations, but the rapid emergence of the alternative media wasn't accompanied with the same level of training which made it under the effects of the moods and abilities and limits of the people responsible.

The Syrian authorities fought the activist through targeting them directly with killings and arrest, as many of them suffered death under torture to be a warning to the rest of their colleagues.

When the popular protests turned to an internal conflict, violations against media personnel started to happen more widely by all other nongovernmental parties, and this violations increased drastically, as this report try to shed light on this matter to deliver a simple concept of the grave sacrifices made by media activist and journalists in order to deliver the truth that coasted many of them their lives, and we've recorded many cases that the last photo taken by a photographer lens was the moment he lost his life.





The emergence of the extremist groups on top of it ISIS added a new type of terrorism and new ways of killing and abducting journalists, as happened with the two American journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff and Japanese journalist Kinji Goto. The areas under the armed opposition control wasn't safe of all different type of violations and crimes against media activist, and also wasn't safe of the attempts to direct the word and opinion by gun force and refusing the other side opinion, that wasn't limited on the pro-government forces journalists but exceeded that to local activist who refused to intellectual dependency and criticized their actions and violations of the armed opposition factions.

Same as the areas controlled by the PEOPLE'S PROTECTION UNITS as the violations varied between abduction, pursuit, harassment, and exile, what led to many journalists running away or stop working.

The killings, torturing, and abductions led to hundreds of journalists running outside the country after realizing the impossibility of working inside Syria for many reasons the most important is: the loss of safety, freedom, and the suitable environment, which means we are talking about the constant bleeding of hundreds of journalists the media have lost and will lose every day.

In addition to the killings and abductions of foreign journalists, that pushed the foreign news agencies to stop their reporters and warn them from going inside Syria In return there are no real efforts put to protect media personnel or just limit the crimes and violations committed against them.

Finally, the terrible negative role of the hatred, incitement, and sectarianism speech and spreading the culture of extremism, which kicked off from the Syrian authorities media, and pro-countries such as Lebanon, Iraq and Iran, in contrast, there is a prominent role for some journalists of the militant groups and workers in some Arab channels providing support to large militant groups, and give them large tracts of media coverage, and give credit of many victories that they were slightly involved in; which what gave wide popularity, and the accession of a large number of the Syrian people to it, all those journalists must be held accountable on the basis of the Security Council resolution 2170 issued on August 15, 2014, and resolution 2199 issued on February 12, 2015.





Syria has become in the bottom of the abyss in terms of media activism, amidst total impunity for any of the parties.

Report Methodology

According to SNHR methodology, a citizen-journalist is who plays an important role in the transfer and dissemination of news, which is not necessarily a neutral person, as it is supposed to be the case of the journalist.

When the citizen-journalist takes up arms and directly get involved in offensive combat operations, he is no longer a citizen-journalist, and the title come back to him once he quit military action completely.

This report is mainly based on archives and investigations of SNHR - our methodology in documenting victims can be checked- in addition to the testimonies of residents and relatives of the victims, and information received from local activists, and analyzing the images and videos that we received and we hold in our records from 2011 Until now.

All this amid security and logistical difficulties and challenges in accessing all areas where the violations happen, so we always point out that all these statistics and facts represent only the minimum number and magnitude of the crimes and violations that occurred.

We have included in this report new instances that were not included in previous reports, the report does not have space to display all journalists who have been subjected to violations.





B- Executive Summary:

SNHR has documented the death of 463 media activists since March 2011 distributed according to the party responsible of their death as follows:

- 1. Government forces:** 399 media activists including 5 foreign and 28 who died under torture in detention centers.
- 2. Extremist groups:**
 - (i) ISIS:** 27 media activist including 3 foreign journalists
 - (ii) An-Nusra Front:** 6 media activists
- 3. Armed opposition factions:** 20 media activists including 3 women
- 4. Unidentified groups:** 11 media activist including a foreign journalist

b. Abduction or Arrest:

SNHR recorded 1027 cases of arrest and abduction distributed as follows:

1. Government forces: 868 arrests including 12 foreign journalists.
2. People's Protection Units: 24 cases of arrests and abduction
3. Extremist groups:
 - A. ISIS: 62 cases of arrest and abduction including 13 foreign journalists.
 - B. An-Nusra front: 13 abduction cases including 2 foreign journalists.
 - C. Jund Al-Aqssa: a journalist was abducted and released later.
4. Armed opposition factions: 42 cases of abduction and arrest including 2 foreign journalists.
5. Unidentified groups: 17 abduction cases recorded including 3 foreign journalists.

C- Details

Violations:

a. Extrajudicial killing:

SNHR documented that government forces killed 399 media activists including 5 foreign journalists and 28 media activists who died under torture in detention centers. Huda Al-Ali, a researcher at SNHR says:

“The Syrian authorities have worked with all its strength for the confiscation of freedom and tried to blackout the media from the crimes since the start of the popular protests in March 2011, and followed the confiscation and closure and exclusion policy for each media voice against its own; in order to blur the realities of the course of events that occur on the ground, and the authorities activated its media machine to mislead public opinion, both internally and externally, and blew up the image that was transmitted by activists on the ground, accusing them of collaboration with the outside media and fabrication, as has been the promotion of a culture of fear and terror among the media opponents. “





“Palestine today” was born in the town of Mouadamiyya in Damascus suburbs, 30 years old, graduated from the Faculty of Media and Communication at the University of Damascus in 2007, he worked in several Syrian and Arabic television stations, the last channel (Palestine today), he was arrested by the Air Force security in Damascus on Thursday, 13 September 2012, at one of the Air Force Intelligence checkpoints while he was on his way to work from Mouadamiyya to Mezza neighborhood in Damascus, where the channel, which are affiliated to the Palestine Islamic Jihad movement, headquarter is located close to government authorities, soon after that the military field court sentenced him to prison for 15 years. Died due to torture in Sednaya Damascus suburbs in December 2013, and his fate remained under wraps for 4 months, until the Security personnel informed his family of his death on 29 April 2014, where his personal ID card given to them without his body.



Bilal Ahmed Bilal

-Mohammed Al-Khatib, born Mouadamiyyat Al-Sham in Damascus suburbs, 34, a graduate of Damascus University Faculty of Media and Communication, he worked for several Syrian newspapers, before security forces arrested him on Sunday 8 January 2012, as a result of him standing in front of the Arab mission team that was headed by Sudanese General Mohammed Al-Dabi, where he explained to them the violations by government forces, killing and bombing and the arrest and kidnapping.

He paid his life as a price for this testimony, as Mohammad moved among many branches of the security before transferring to Sednaya prison on charges of terrorism, then the security forces officially informed his family of his death, and handed over his identity papers for example his “ID card” on Friday, 27 June 2014, and his relatives informed us of his death.



Mohammed Al-Khatib





- On Monday at 8 December 2014, government forces killed three journalists with a targeted rocket-propelled shell that targeted their car in Sheikh Mskeen in Daraa, while the car didn't have a "media" label, it was carrying a satellite receiver that was clearly visible.

The journalists were: Youssef Mahmoud Al-Dous, Adil Rami Ala'asmi and cameraman Salem Al-Khalil.

- Youssef Mahmoud Al-Dous born in Bosra Al-Sham in Dara, 29, a graduate of the Faculty of English Literature Department in 2011, one of the members of the Syrian Journalists Association, and one of the founders of the Media Office in Daraa, with many distinct media activities, his journalistic work had begun with the launch of the Popular protests, as a media activist who conveys and depicts events in Daraa, that became a field reporter for Orient TV channel in Daraa, and prepared many field reports and humanitarian ones from both Daraa and Qunaitra.



Youssef Mahmoud
Al-Dous

- Rami Adel Ala'asmi, from Dael in Daraa, 26, he studied computer engineering at the University of Damascus, was one of the first who streamed live broadcast via his mobile phone, a founding member of the media office in Dael, and worked as a reporter for the Orient News Channel he wrote for a number of newspapers that have emerged during the protests.



Rami Adel Ala'asmi





- [Cameraman Salem Khalil](#), 27, was born in Bosra Al-Sham in Daraa, a graduate of the Institute of Computer Engineering, 2009, he recorded with his lens a lot of battles and events in Daraa province, and became a cameraman for Orient TV Channel with his colleague Yoseph Al-Dous. Salem was formerly ex-combatant in the armed opposition after defecting from the government army earlier, but he retired from fighting and went to journalistic work as a photographer.

b. Arbitrary and Illegal Detention:

SNHR documented the arrest of 868 media activists by government forces including 12 foreign journalists.

-Omar Al-Shaar, a Syrian journalist and activist and Editing Manager of the English version of “D-Press” news website arrested by government forces on Friday morning 31 October 2014 with Mr. Jadei’a Nawfel and Dr. Maria Bahjat Sha’abo, Omar was sent to Adra central prison, and the judge agreed on releasing him on Wednesday 17 December 2014, and he was released on Thursday 18 December 2014.



This is the second time that Omar was arrested, as he was arrested by government forces earlier on Monday, 11 November 2013.

Image of Omar Al-Shaar

- Sunday 15 February 2015 SNHR documented the arrests of Swedish journalist “Joachim Medellin”, and “ the interpreter “Sabri Omar” who accompanied as a translator, at one of the government forces military checkpoints during their coverage of some events in Qamishlo after they went into a wrong path by mistake, they were released later on Saturday 21 February 2015.





Swedish journalist
Joachim Medellin



Translator Omar Sabri

2. People's Protection Units: Illegal Arrest and Detention:

SNHR documented 24 cases of arrests and abduction between media personnel by People's Protection Units forces, all were released.

-Friday, 18 July 2014, People's Protection Units arrested media activist Sakfan Amine "Camera-man of Zagros Channel" in Malkiyye in Hasakah after raiding his house and he was released on Tuesday, 22 July 2014



Media activist Sakfan Amine

- Wednesday, 3 December 2014, members of "Terrorist Raid Task Force" a new security forces affiliated with the People's Protection Units - according to what local residents told us- arrested media activist [Mahmoud Koresh](#) "coordination of Azadi Afrin" member, and Ali Abd al-Rahman, both were released on Thursday, 26 March 2015.





3. Extremist Groups:

1- ISIS:

a. Extrajudicial killings:

SNHR documented ISIS killing 27 media activists including 3 foreign journalists since its founding in April 2013

1. Tuesday, 19 August 2014, ISIS broadcasted video footage on the Internet entitled “Letter to America”, the alleged slaughter of American journalist James Foley, after he was abducted on Thursday, 22 November 2012 in northern Syria, near Tافته in Idlib, and is believed that he was abducted by the Mujahideen Shura Council, which pledged allegiance to ISIS later.



American journalist James Foley

2. Tuesday 2 September 2014, ISIS broadcasted a video footage titled “Second Letter to America” depicts American journalist [Stephen Sotloff](#) execution process who was abducted in Aleppo on Monday 4 August 2014.

3. On Saturday, 31 January 2015, ISIS published video footage shows one of the organization members slaughtering the Japanese journalist Kenji Goto, after he was kidnapped by the organization while moving from Aleppo to Raqqa early October 2014.



journalist Kenji Goto





b. Illegal Arrest and Detention:

SNHR documented 62 cases of arrest and abduction committed by ISIS including 13 foreign journalists.

- Thursday 18 September 2014 ISIS broadcasted video entitled “listen to British hostage John Cantlie messages” the organization revealed the detention of British journalist John Cantlie after he gone missing in northern Syria in November 2012.

ISIS forced John to prepare several propaganda videos shows ISIS control Ein Al-Arab “Kobani” in Aleppo, the video clip was broadcasted on Saturday 27 November 2014.

And his fate remain unknown for SNHR until the moment of preparing this report



British journalist John Cantlie

- Monday at 15 December 2014, SNHR documented ISIS members abducting press crew of Rudaw Channel broadcast in Kurdish and they are are: [journalist Farhad Hamo](#), and [photographer Massoud Aqeel](#) in the countryside of Qamishli, while returning from the town of Tel Kouger, on Yarubia international road . Their fate remains unknown to SNHR until the moment of preparing the report

2- An-Nusra Front:

a. Extrajudicial killing:

An-Nusra front killed 6 media activists since its founding

Monday 26 January 2015, SNHR documented the death of Walid Al-Qasim, from Mariameen in Aleppo in An-Nusra front prisons after his arrest on Wednesday, 12 October 2014, with five people - from brigades of Fajr Al-Huriyya of the armed opposition - who were with him during passing through Huraytan.

[Media activist Walid Al-Qasim](#), worked in the Turkmen news agency and then worked with Aleppo News Agency





b. Illegal arrest and detention:

SNHR documented 13 cases of abduction by An-Nusra front including 2 foreign journalists.

An-Nusra front arrested Ahmad Jadaan “reporter of Basmet Syria Network “ also his brother the photographer Hammoud Jadaan was arrested with him on Sunday, 28 December 2014, during the raid and arrests carried out by the organization in the village of Joseph in Idlib, and states that the brothers from the town of Kafr Nubl, has been released later on Sunday 4 January 2015.



Photographer Hammoud Jadaan



Media activist Ahmed Jadaan

2. On Wednesday, 7 January 2015, SNHR recorded the abduction of [Ma’ad Parish](#) “Member of the Media Office of Sraqb Today” with his colleague Wathab Al-Azo by members of An-Nusra Front, while they were on their way from Bab Al-Hawa to Sraqb, both were released later on Saturday 31 January 2015.

3- Jund Al-Aqssa Organization:

a. Illegal abduction and detention:

Thursday 4 December 2014, SNHR documented the abduction of media activist [Laith Al-Abdullah](#) al by Jund Al-Aqssa from outside his home in Sraqb in Idlib, and was released later on Monday 22 December 2014.

Laith previously have been abducted and tortured by masked group we couldn’t identify in Sraqb, on Wednesday, 20 August 2014, but was released on the same day after the theft of all equipment and identity papers.





4. Armed Opposition Factions Violations:

a. Extrajudicial killings:

SNHR documented armed opposition forces killing 20 media activists including 3 women.

Monday, 14 April 2014 SNHR recorded the killing of three from Al-Manar channel crew, and they are reporter [Hamza Al-Hajj Hassan](#) and cameraman Mohammed Mantash and technical Halim Alwa, in the town of Maloula in Damascus suburbs, following shots by opposition militants, when they entered the town, accompanied by members of the Government forces, it was after the latter were controlling the town after violent armed clashes continued days before with opposition militants, and we could not be sure of the Manar team allegations about the presence of the press logo on the channel vehicles because the images and videos do not clarify it.



Al-Manar TV team

- Tuesday, 17 February 2015, SNHR documented the killing of the [television director](#) for Al Manar [Hassan Abdullah](#), by fire of the armed opposition factions, while escorting the elements of the Hezbollah militia in the northern countryside of the province of Aleppo, and it happened in the context of armed clashes between the two parties.

b. Illegal arrests and abduction:

SNHR documented 42 incidents between abduction and arrest by the armed opposition factions, including 2 foreign journalists.

-Thursday, 15 May 2014 members of the so-called “Hakim Anzeh” battalion of the Islamic Front of the armed opposition abducted British [reporter of newspaper The Times Anthony Lloyd](#), and [photographer Jack Hill](#), and their escort Mahmoud Al-Basha, while crossing from Tel Refa’at in Aleppo heading to Turkey, Anthony





was hit by a gunshot in his leg trying to escape, other elements of the same faction interfered and set them free after a few hours.

- Monday 9 February 2015, (armed members belonging to the Unified House of Judiciary in the city of Irbeen, Damascus suburbs It follows a group of factions of the armed opposition in East Ghouta) raided Media Headquarters of “Irbeen Coordinating” and arrested of four media activist, they are: (Zakwan Kahale , Abdul Sattar Sharaf, Samer Sheikh Hassan, Nizar Al-Haj Ali) they were charged and detained in branch very close to the front line of the conflicts; what threatened their safety and put it at serious risk, and did not allow the people of the abductees to visit them and check on them, according to the Coordinating announcement on the [official front page on Facebook](#) .

They were released later on 14 February 2015, having been dropped all charges against them and acquitted them.

[Image judicial memorandum](#) issued by the unified judiciary in Arbin where media publishing the names of wanted to investigate

5. Unidentified groups;

a. Extrajudicial killings:

SNHR documented the death of 11 media activists including one foreign journalist by unidentified armed groups

On Wednesday, 10 September 2014 SNHR recorded the killing of journalist Mohamed Abdul Jalil Al-Qasim, 24 years old, “Al-Jazeera Net report Al-Qasim er”, in the countryside of Idlib as a result of the shooting by an unidentified armed group on the car carrying him, accompanied by Mr. Abu Ali, commander of the battalion of Ashab Al-Yameen on the road between the villages of Al-Ghadfeh and Abu Dafneh.



Mohamed Al-Qasim





On Thursday, 1 January 2015, SNHR recorded the death of media activist Dirar Musa Al-Jahed “doctor and member of the Local Coordination Committees and Media Office in the city Ibta’a in Daraa province” by four bullets from an unidentified gunman, after they broke into his house at night and opened fire on him and 3 others who were with him in the house.



media activist Dirar Musa Al-Jahed

b. Illegal arrest and abduction:

- [Alaa Al-Din Yousef](#), Al-Jazeera Mubasher reporter in Idlib, was abducted by an unidentified armed group near Darkoush Bridge, on Saturday 5 April 2014 as he was on his way to Kasab to cover the events there, then he was released on Saturday 12 April 2014 after suffering threats and torture.

- [American journalist Austin Tice](#), 33, worked in several newspapers, including “McClatchy News”, “The Washington Post”, “CBS Network” in addition to his collaboration with Agence France-Presse and the BBC, “BBC” and “Associated Press”, was abducted by an armed group near Damascus on Tuesday, 14 August 2012, and his family has launched a media campaign demanding the disclosure of his fate on Friday 6 February 2015.

Recommendations

a. To Human Rights Committee:

Condemning the targeting of media activists in Syria and shedding light on their sacrifices and suffering.

b. To International Investigation Committee:

Carry out investigations on targeting media activists specially, due to their vital role in recording the events in Syria.

c. Security Council:

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





d. Arab and International Media Organizations:

Supporting their colleague by publishing periodic reports that shed light on their daily suffering and memorialize their sacrifices, as they should communicate with their family to condole them.

And last, all the parties must commit to what the International Humanitarian Law states regarding the protection of civilians especially media activists and their equipment.

Acknowledgment

Our sincere condolence to the families of the victims and all the appreciation and gratitude to the families and friends of the media activists, as their testimonies contributed essentially to this report.

