

Four Media Activists Killed, Nine Arrested and Abducted, and One Injured

Toll of January 2017

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



Report Contents

- I. Introduction
- II. Methodology
- III. Executive Summary
- IV. Details
- V. Recommendations
- Acknowledgment

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 Ghani, 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.”



On December 30, 2016, a comprehensive ceasefire was announced in Syria under a Russian-Turkish sponsorship. The parties signing to the statement - the Syrian regime, on one hand, and armed opposition factions, on the other hand, pledged to cease all combat operations including aerial airstrikes, and cease all raids and advancements on the ground. However, military ISIS-held areas (Self-proclaimed the Islamic State) were excluded from the agreement. Since the Ankara Ceasefire Agreement went into effect, there has been a decent and notable drop in the rates of killing throughout Syria in comparison with the previous months from March 2011 until now. The main focus here is the areas under the control of armed opposition factions, as the Syrian regime-held areas aren't subjected to heavy, daily aerial bombardment, which has resulted in the killing of no less than 60% of the victims, and destroyed buildings, displacing the people of Syria.

Nonetheless, breaches didn't stop, mainly by the Syrian regime, who is seemingly the party that would be affected the most should the ceasefire go on, especially crimes of extrajudicial killing, and, more horrendously, dying due to torture, which strongly proves that there is some sort of ceasefire on the table. The crimes, however, that the international community wasn't able to notice, and particularly the Turkish and Russian sponsors, are still ongoing as nothing has changed in that regard.

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.

I. 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.

II. Executive Summary

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

A. Killing: SNHR documented the killing of 4 media activists as follows:

- Syrian regime forces: killed 1 media activist
- ISIS: killed 1 media activist
- Other parties: killed 2 media activists

B. Injuries: we recorded 1 injury at the hands of ISIS

C. Arrest, release, and abduction: we recorded 13 cases as follows:

- Syrian regime forces: we recorded 5 cases of arrest including two women
- Fateh Al Sham Front: we recorded 2 cases of arrest, where the detained media activists were released later.
- Armed opposition factions: we recorded 1 case of arrest
- Other parties: we recorded 2 abduction cases, where one of the two abductees was released later.



IV. Details

A. Violations by Syrian regime forces (Army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias)

Killing

Tuesday, January 10, 2017, media activist [Ammar Bashir Al Kamel](#) was killed by shrapnel in his head and most of his body. The shrapnel from a shoulder-launched rocket that fell near him after it was fired by Syrian regime forces as he was covering the Syrian regime forces' breaches of the ceasefire agreement on the outskirts of Kherbat Ghazala town in Daraa governorate.

[Ammar](#), a [reporter](#) for the media institution Tajmoua' Ahrar Houran (The Assembly of Houran's Free Men), from Ghassem town in the suburbs of Daraa governorate, born in 1992, first-year university student studying English-at faculty of literature, single.



SNHR contacted the media activist Abu Mahmoud Al Hourani, a friend of Ammar's, via Facebook:

"[Ammar](#) was documenting the shelling by the regime who was breaching the ceasefire in Daraaa. A directed rocket fell near him, as he was near Kherbat Ghazalla at the town. The shrapnel hit his head and most of his body."

Arrest

Wednesday, January 25, 2017, Syrian regime force arrested four media activists including one woman (We are going to refrain from revealing their names and information as per their families' request) in Damascus city. They were taken to an unknown location to their families as well as SNHR.

Thursday, January 26, 2017, Syrian regime forces arrested a female media activist (We are going to refrain from revealing her name as per her family's request) in Damascus city. She was taken to an unknown location to her family as well as SNHR.

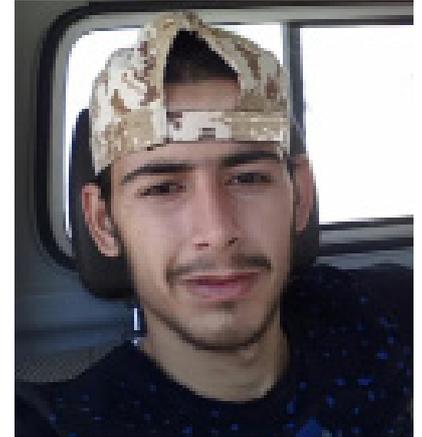


B. Violations by Extremist Islamic groups

ISIS

- Killing

Friday, January 13, 2017, media activist [Obayda Ahmad Hussein Al Ghabaghi](#) died of his injuries in his chest, face, and right hand that he sustained the day before. [Obayda's](#) injuries were caused by shrapnel from a shell fired by ISIS that fell near him as he was covering the clashes between ISIS and armed opposition factions on the battlefield of the western area in Haud Al Yarmouk in the western suburbs of Daraa governorate. Even though [Obayda](#) was rushed immediately to Jordan, he died of his injuries.



[Obayda](#), a photographer for Al Khalifa Omar ben Abd Al Aziz battalion, an armed opposition factions, from Kheil village in the suburbs of Daraa governorate, born in 1991, has a high school diploma, single.

- Injuries

Tuesday, January 10, 2017, media activist [Ahmad Mohammad Ulabi](#) was injured in the chest and feet by shrapnel from a mortar shell fired by ISIS that fell near him as he was covering the clashes between ISIS and armed opposition factions on the outskirts of Al Bab city in the suburbs of Aleppo governorate.

[Ahmad](#), a photographer for Al Hamza squad, an armed opposition factions, from Al Bab city in the suburbs of Aleppo governorate, born in 1992, has an intermediate education certificate, married and has kids.



SNHR contacted the media activist Majed Al Halabi, a friend of the media activist Ahmad Mohammad Ualbi's, via Facebook:

“On Tuesday, 10 January, a mortar shell fired by ISIS fell near Ahmad when he was covering the clashes between the rebels and ISIS on the outskirts of Al Bab city. He was immediately rushed to a hospital in Kelles city in Turkey, and then to a hospital in Gaziantep city in Turkey.”



Fateh Al Sham (Formerly Al Nussra Front)

- Arrest and release

Thursday, January 5, 2017, Fateh Al Sham Front arrested the media activist [Mousa Al Abdullah](#) after they arrested him as one of their checkpoints on Ifreen – Darat Ezza road in the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate in May 2016. He was transferred to the prison of Harem city in the suburbs of Idlib governorate. SNHR wasn't able to learn the details of his arrest until after he was released.

Mousa, works for the two media offices of squad 101 and squad 13, armed opposition factions, he is from Ma'aret Al Nu'man city in the suburbs of Idlib governorate.

Saturday, January 14, 2017, Fateh Al Sham Front released the media activist Obada Ahmad Al Mansour, who was arrested by the group in September 2016 in Idlib governorate on charges of working with ISIS. SNHR wasn't able to learn the details of his arrest until after he was released.

[Obada](#), known as Obada Al Ansari, media activist and worked formerly as a report with the Turkish TV channel RT, from Hass town in the suburbs of Idlib governorate, was 27-year-old at the time of the arrest.

C. Violations by armed opposition factions

Arrest

Friday, January 13, 2017, Al Jabha Al Shamia arrested the media activist Amer Al Hasan as he was a checkpoint for the group in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. His fate is still unknown to SNHR as well as his family.

[Amer](#), a media activist for the Syrian Popular Movement, from Al Sfiera city in the suburbs of Aleppo governorate, has a high school diploma, born in 1989, married and has kids.



D. Other parties

Killing

Friday, January 20, 2017, media activist [Sha'ban Faisal Al Tawil](#) died of injuries in the head, feet, and abdomen that he sustained after a car bomb detonated near him as he was covering the evacuation of armed opposition factions' fighters in Bait Jen town in Damascus suburbs governorate -they headed to Idlib governorate- as part of the settlement with Syrian regime forces. As of this writing, we haven't been able to identify the group behind the bombing,

[Sha'ban](#), known as Hesham Al Haj Ali or Abu Zaid Al Hemsj, an independent media activist and photographer, and also a works on preparing reports as he cooperates with Al Arabiya Al Hadath TV channel, from Aabil village in the suburbs of Homs governorate, born in 1992, has a certificate from the Technical Institute for Computer, married.



Saturday, January 28, 2017, media activist [Ahmad Mohammad Dek](#) died of wounds in most of his body caused by shrapnel from an exploding landmine of unknown origins, as he was covering the clashes between ISIS and armed opposition factions on the battlefield of Al Meqri village which is affiliated to Al Bab city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. As of this writing, we haven't been able to identify the group that planted the landmine.



[Ahmad](#), a photographer for Fauj Al Mustafa, an armed opposition factions, from Minnigh town in the suburbs of Aleppo governorate, born in 1996, a first-year university student at the faculty of political sciences in Al Sham International University, single.



Abduction

Tuesday, January 10, 2017, unknown armed men abducted the photographer [Shiraz Mohammad](#) near Al Jamiliya village which is affiliated to Darkoush district in Idlib governorate. It is noted that the armed men stopped the car in which Shiraz was along with some of his organization's members, as he was heading to Htayya border crossing with Turkey. They took him to an unknown location.

[Shiraz](#), a [photographer](#) for Gift of the Givers organization who also works as a human worker with the organization. Born in 1979, from South Africa.



Sunday, January 22, 2017, unknown men abducted the media activist [Saifollah Al Ahmad](#) near the eastern entrance to Talibsa city in the northern suburbs of Homs governorate, the city is under the control of armed opposition factions. The abductors detained Saifollah for one hour and a half inside a KIA vehicle, where he was beaten and threatened. He was later released on Homs-Hama highway. As of this writing, we couldn't identify the group that abducted him.



[Saifollah](#), a reporter for Orient News TV channel in the northern suburbs of Homs governorate, from Talbisa city in the suburbs of Homs governorate, born in 1993, graduated from the Technical Health Institute with a diploma in medical machine maintenance, married. SNHR contacted Saifollah via Facebook, who told us the following:

“Around 5:30 PM, I was stopped by six armed men in a KIA vehicle, while I was driving my motorcycle at the eastern entrance of Talbisa city in the suburbs of Homs governorate. They forced me to get in the car, where one of them drove my motorcycle. In the car, there were three armed men insulting me and Orient TV channel. They then assaulted me using a sharp thing. They threatened to abduct me from the middle of my house in case I talked about them, before releasing me on the highway and returning my motorcycle.”



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.

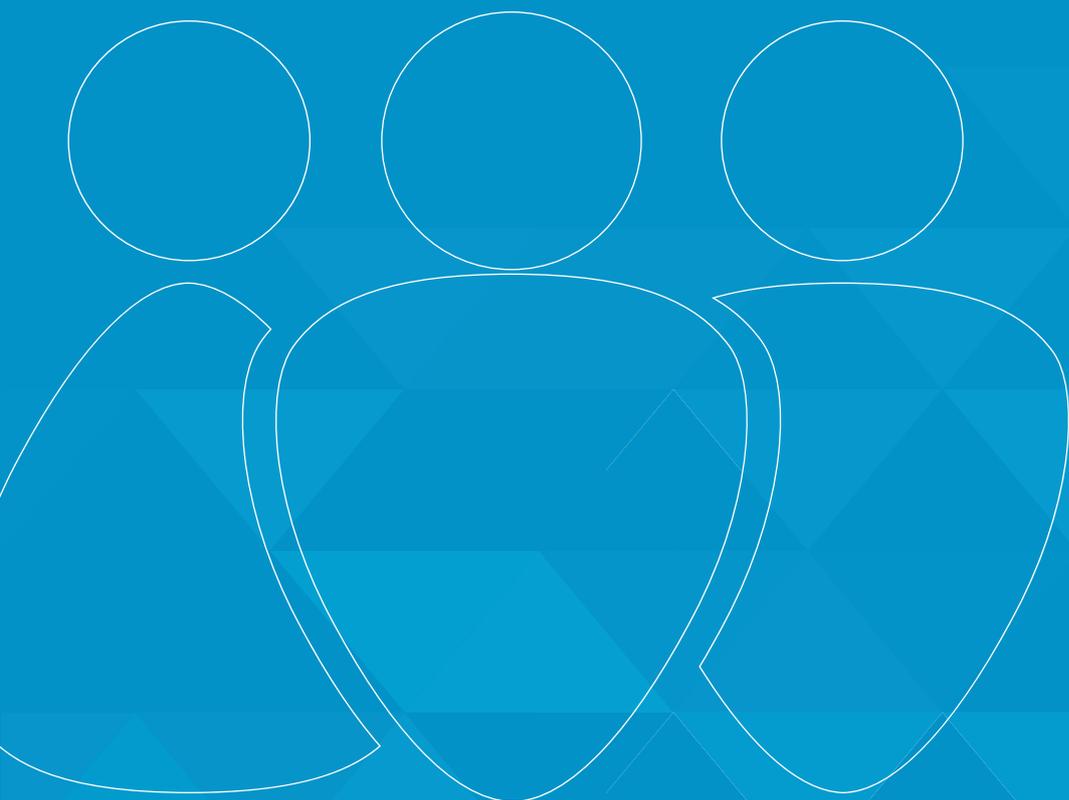
Finally, all parties have to respect the international humanitarian law with respect to the protection of civilians and especially media activists and their equipment.

Acknowledgment

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.

Acknowledgment





@snhr



Info@sn4hr.org

www.sn4hr.org

