

Three Media Workers Killed, Three Injured, and Four Arrested in Syria, Toll of April 2018

13 Media Workers Have been
Killed in Syria in 2018

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.



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I. Introduction and Methodology

Parties to the conflict have oppressed journalists and citizen journalists to varying extents, committing crimes qualifying as war crimes against them. The Syrian regime, however, is the party who has perpetrated most of these crimes since March 2011, where the Syrian regime has been responsible for up to 83% as it waged a systematic war on media workers, committing hundreds of violations against journalists and citizen journalists, including killing, arrest, and torture in an attempt to conceal the human rights violations that the Syrian people are being subjected to and hide the crimes against Syrian citizens.

On the other hand, ISIS, factions from the armed opposition and Self-Management forces resorted to suppressing views as a policy in their areas of control as seen by the wide arrests they made.

In light of all of that, Syria has fallen to the 177th place (out of 180 countries) according to the Reports Without Borders' [Press Freedom Index 2018](#)

A journalist is a civilian individual according to the international humanitarian law regardless of their nationality. Any attack deliberately directed against a journalist is considered a war crime. However, when a media worker gets close to action-heavy zones, they are responsible for their own actions where targeting them in such case would be seen as collateral damage. Also, they would lose the right to protection if they were involved in hostilities.

The international humanitarian law states that journalists should be protected, as Article 79 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 says that civilian



journalists who are engaged in missions in areas of armed conflict should be respected, considered as civilians, and protected from all forms of deliberate attacks, provided that they take to action adversely affecting their status as civilians. Additionally, Rule 34 of the international humanitarian law's customary rules states that:” **Civilian journalists engaged in professional missions in areas of armed conflict must be respected and protected as long as they are not taking a direct part in hostilities.**”

In addition, Security Council adopted [Resolution 2222](#) on May 27, 2015, which condemns all violations and abuses committed against journalists, media professionals and associated personnel in situations of armed conflict,

Methodology

This report monitors the most notable violations against media workers (journalists and citizen journalists) in April 2018 by the parties to the conflict.

SNHR defines a citizen journalist as anyone who plays a significant role in reporting and publishing news. He is not necessarily impartial as a journalist should be. In case a citizen journalist bore arms and was directly engaged in hostilities, he would be no longer deemed a citizen journalist whereas it is possible that he would be referred to as a citizen journalist again, provided he retires completely from military action.

This report draws upon, firstly, on the daily, ongoing documentation and monitoring efforts by SNHR team, and, secondly, on accounts from survivors, eyewitnesses, and local media workers that we've talked to via phone or social media. We have also analyzed a large number of the videos and pictures that were posted online or we received from local activists via e-mail, Skype, and social media. We have copies of all the videos and pictures included in this report in a secret online database, as well as backup copies on hard drives. We always make sure to store this data with its respective source. Nonetheless, we can't claim that we have documented all cases, in light of the ban and pursuit by Syrian regime forces and some of the other armed groups.

Please see the methodology adopted by SNHR for [documenting victims](#).

This report contains five accounts that we've collected through speaking directly to eyewitnesses, and not are cited from any open sources. We have explained the purpose of these interviews for the eyewitnesses who gave us permission to use the information they provided without offering or giving them any incentives. Also, SNHR tried to spare the eyewitnesses the agony of remembering the violation as much as possible, and gave insurances to conceal the identity of any witness who preferred to use an alias.



The report might include incidents that we believe do not constitute violations of the international humanitarian law. We include it, however, to preserve the truth historically and store it as a national record, but we don't describe it as having qualified as crimes.

II. April 2018 Outline

SNHR has recorded a drop in the number of media workers killed, as well as the broader range violations against media workers in April. On the other hand, we've recorded a number of cases where the profession of journalism was abused in April, including when a pro-Syrian regime media worker named [Hussein Murtada](#) was taking picture of himself in front of Douma city as it was being bombed by Syrian regime forces and their allies, where he was gloating over the suffering of the residents, uttering sectarian slurs. Also, Russia, a permanent member state of the Security Council who should respect its stature and abstain from resorting to all this lies and deceits, abused this as the Ministry of Defense has released [a video](#) of medical personnel in Douma city, Eastern Ghouta, after it had taken over the area, to refute the allegations of the two chemical attack on the city on April 7, as one of the two attacks resulted in the killing of 41 civilians.

III. Executive Summary

A. Death toll among media activists since the start of 2018

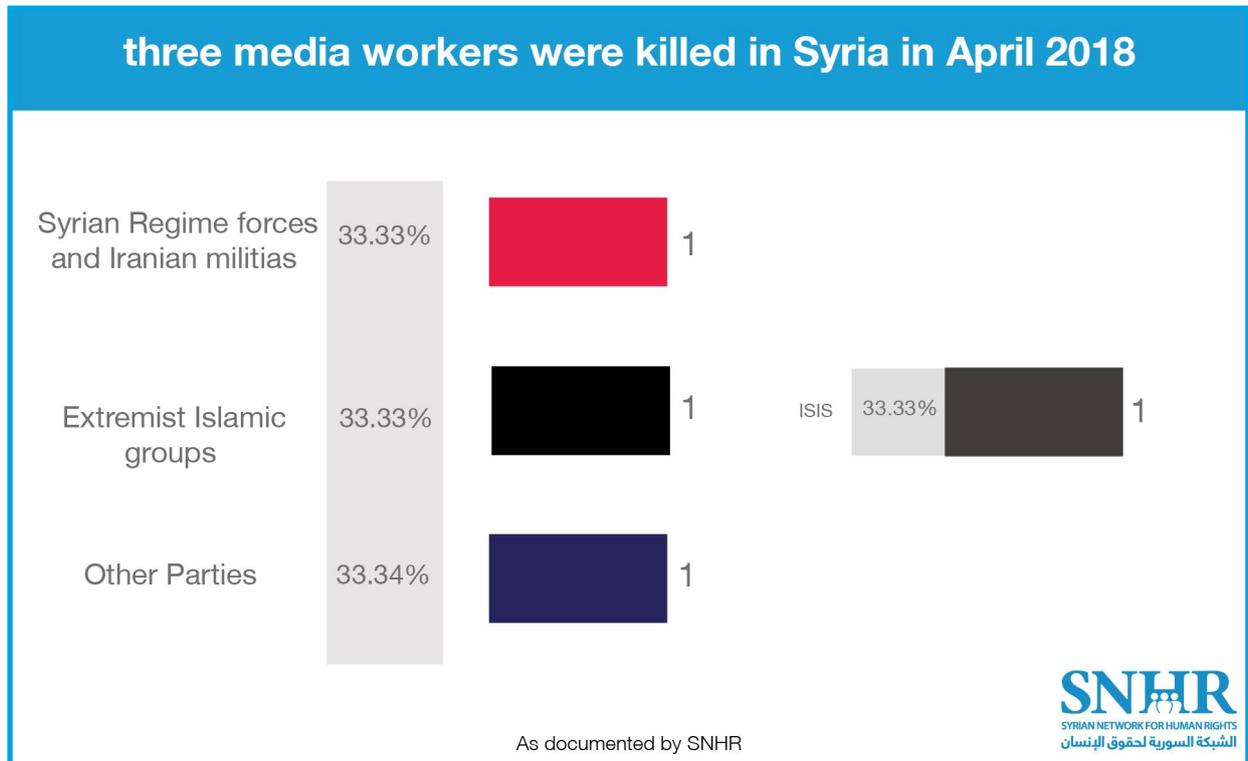
SNHR has documented that 13 media workers were killed between the start of 2018 and May of the same year at the hands of the parties to the conflict in Syria. Death toll is distributed by month as follows:



B. Violations against media workers in April 2018

Violations against media workers in April 2018 were distributed as follows:

- **Acts of killing:** SNHR has documented the killing of three media workers, as follows:



- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): 1

- Extreme Islamic groups:

ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State): 1

- Other parties: 1

- **Injuries:** we have recorded that three media workers were injured, as follows:

- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): 2

- Other parties: 1

- **Arrest and release:** We've recorded 6 cases, including 1 woman (adult female), as follows:

- Extremist Islamic groups

Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions from the armed opposition): we've recorded one case of arrest

- Factions from the armed opposition: we've recorded three cases of arrest, including one woman. Two have been released so far.



IV. Details

A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias)

- Acts of killing

Bashar al Attar

Monday, March 12, 2018, Bashar was killed as he was hit directly in a bombing by fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) who fired a number of missiles near his house in Irbeen city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. We haven't been able to verify the incident until Thursday, April 26, after contacting activists from the area. The area is under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of this writing, while it was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Bashar, known as Bashar Abu Zaher, a photographer for the Unified Media Office in Irbeen city, from Irbeen city, born in 1999, single.

The media worker Baraa Abu al Yusr¹ confirmed to SNHR that an airstrike targeted the area surrounding Bashar's house in Irbeen city on the noon of March 12, **“The missile has torn apart Bashar's body, after it landed near him.”**

- Injuries

Ammar Suleiman (real name was concealed for security concerns)

Saturday, April 15, 2018, [a shrapnel inflicted](#) Ammar's right leg which had to amputated from the middle of the knee, as fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired missiles at [the house](#) where he was at in Ein Tarma town, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. In light of the circumstances surrounding the area, we haven't been able to contact Ammar and verify the incident until Friday, April 20. The town is under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of this writing, while it was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



¹ We contacted him via Telegram on April 26, 2018



Ammar, a media worker for Jobar Coordinate and an independent photographer who works for Anadolu Agency and AFP, born in 1991, from Jobar neighborhood, eastern Damascus city. Ammar partook in shooting a number of documentaries on Jobar neighborhood, a university student at the department of communication and electronics, faculty of engineering.

SNHR contacted Ammar² who told us that he was with his two friends, who are also media workers, Abu Eyad and Maher Abu al Kheir, **“I was about to leave the house at 11:00, heading for a hospital to cover the developments, when warplanes bombed a number of fires near the house I was at, and a shrapnel inflicted my leg. I was rushed to Jobar neighborhood’s medical office, and then to al Haya Hospital. The injury forced me to have my right leg amputated, but, thank God, my two friends’ injuries were minor.”** Ammar added that he was forcibly displaced from Eastern Ghouta, and he is now in al Atareb city, western suburbs of Aleppo.

Isam Mohammad Hasan Abdul Hai

Monday, March 12, 2018, shrapnel inflicted Isam’s left foot, shoulder, and chest. The shrapnel were from a bombing by fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) who fired missiles at Jisreen town, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, as he was heading to a mosque for al Fajr Prayer. We haven’t been able to contact Isam and verify the incident until April 18. The town is under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of this writing, while it was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Isam Abdul Hai

Isam, known as Isam Abu Jawad, head of the Media Office in Jisreen town, which is affiliated to the local council, from Jisreen town, born on January 1, 1975. Isam is a member of the local council, and also head of the documentation and statistics office in Eastern Ghouta, which is affiliated to the Sharia Commission in Damascus and its suburbs. Isam has a high school degree, married and a father of two children.

² We contacted him via WhatsApp on April 20, 2018



SNHR contacted Isam³ who told us that he left the basement he was taking shelter in with his family around 04:30 on March 12 as he was heading for the mosque for al-Fajr Prayer when Syrian regime forces targeted the area, **“I was inflicted by a number of shrapnel that cut some veins in my left foot, as well as shrapnel in my shoulder and chest. I had to undergo two surgeries in hospitals in Ghouta before I was displaced. When I arrived in Qal’at al Madeiq in Hama, I was transferred to Ma’arat Misreen city in Idlib where I underwent four more surgeries.”** Isam is still under treatment until his wounds heal and he can walk again, as he might need physical therapy, he told us.

B. Extremist Islamic groups

- ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State)

- Acts of killing

Ehab Blan

Friday, April 20, 2018, [SANA](#), as well as pro-Syrian regime forces media outlets, mourned the death of Ehab Blan who was killed by ISIS, as he was covering the clashes between the group and Syrian regime forces in the region of southern Damascus. He was also mourned by Ramzan Kadyrov, [the Chechen President](#), on his account on the social network VKontakte. It should be noted that Ehab was working as a reporter for Grozny Network for Radio and TV.



Ehab Blan

- Hay’at Tahrir al Sham

- Arrest

Ahmad al Akhras

Saturday, April 28, 2018, Ahmad was arrested by Hay’at Tahrir al Sham gunmen in Darkoush town, western suburbs of Idlib governorate, over charges of lacking a permit to take pictures in their areas of control. His fate is still unknown to SNHR as well as his family.

Ahmad al Akhras, reporter for the media office of Qiwa al Thawra and the website sy24, from Kafranbel city, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate.



Ahmad al Akhras

³ A phone call via WhatsApp on March 18, 2018



C. Factions from the armed opposition

- Arrest

Dalshan Qurra Joul

Friday, March 30, 2018, Dalshan was arrested by gunmen from Lewa al Sultan Murad, an armed opposition faction, in Afrin city, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. She was taken to a detention center affiliated to the group in Izaz city, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. She was released on Friday, April 27, 2018. It should be noted that we contacted activists from the area on Monday, April 2, 2018, and verified the news of her arrest.

Dalshan Qurra Joul, a photographer and relief activist, from Afrin city, suburbs of Aleppo governorate, born in 1975.



Doctor Abdul Majid Izzat Shikho

Wednesday, April 4, 2018, he was arrested by gunmen from Ahrar al Sharqiya, an armed opposition faction, who raided his place of residence in Afrin city, northern Aleppo governorate. He was taken to an undisclosed location. His fate is still unknown to SNHR as well as his family.

Abdul Majid, from Jalbal village, northern Aleppo governorate, born in 1951, has a doctorate in media, and head of the media department in Afrin University.



Omar Jijo

Friday, April 13, 2018, he was arrested by gunmen from Lewa al Shamal, affiliated to Failaq al Sham – an armed opposition faction, in Kafra village, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. He was taken to a detention center affiliated to the group in Kafr Kalbin village, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. He was released 90 minutes after his arrest. One of the pictures show [signs of the torture](#) he suffered during his detention. Omar Jijo, known as Abu al Abd, a media activist, head of the Office of Aleppo Governorate and its Suburbs, member of the Syria's Free Media Workers Association, from Kafra village, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate.



Omar⁴ told us that he was threatened multiple times by Lewa al Shamal, which is affiliated to Failaq al Shamal, via phone calls but he never bothered to care, **“Around 10:00, on the morning of April 13, members of Lewa al Shamal raided my house and beat me with my cousin. They took me in their care to one of their centers in Kalbin village.”** Omar added that he was insulted, beaten, accused, and threatened to be killed on the way, **“They interrogated me inside the branch after I posted a video footage showing them shooting randomly at a wedding. I deleted the video immediately after I’ve found out that it wasn’t up to date. They released me 90 minutes later.”**

D. Other parties

Acts of killing

Taleb Abdul Malek al Dries

Friday, April 20, 2018, civil defense members found [the dead body](#) of Taleb in Eqrebat village, northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, near the Syrian-Turkish borders with a sniper’s bullet in his head after he had been missing for five days where he was headed for the Syrian-Turkish borders to enter Turkey illegally. We have yet to identify the group behind his killing as of this writing.

Taleb, from Ma’aret al Nu’mān city, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in 1997, a media with r Ma’aret al Nu’mān Media Center, a first-year university student at Idlib University, unmarried.



- Injuries

Mustafa al Haj Ali

Thursday, April 26, 2018, Mustafa was injured by [gunshots](#) to his [chest](#), as masked gunmen shot him from a car after he left his house in al Nayrab village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. Th village is under the control of Hay’at Tahrir al Sham. Mustafa, a media worker, reporter for Step News Agency, in charge of the media team at the Free Idlib Education Administration, born on January 21, 1985, married and a father of three daughters.



⁴ We contacted him via WhatsApp on April 15, 2018



Mustafa told us⁵ that he headed for the village's market with his daughters on his motorbike around 08:00 on the morning of April 26. He stopped at a motorbike repair shop to pump air into the tires, **“Suddenly, a car closed quickly on me, so I told my kids to get inside the shop at once, and I don't know what happened next. All I remember is me laying on the ground, and shot in the chest, and I didn't know how many bullets hit me,”** Mustafa added that he was rushed to a hospital, **“They told me that a bullet went through my right side and chest, and damaged my lung. Thank God, though, it wasn't close to my heart.”**

V. Recommendations

Security Council

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

OHCHR

Condemn the targeting of media workers in Syria and shed light on their sacrifice and suffering.

Commission of Inquiry (COI)

Launch investigations into the targeting of media workers specifically, given their integral role in recording incidents in Syria.

International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

Address the cases mentioned in this report and past reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and provide more evidences and data.

International and Arabic media institutions

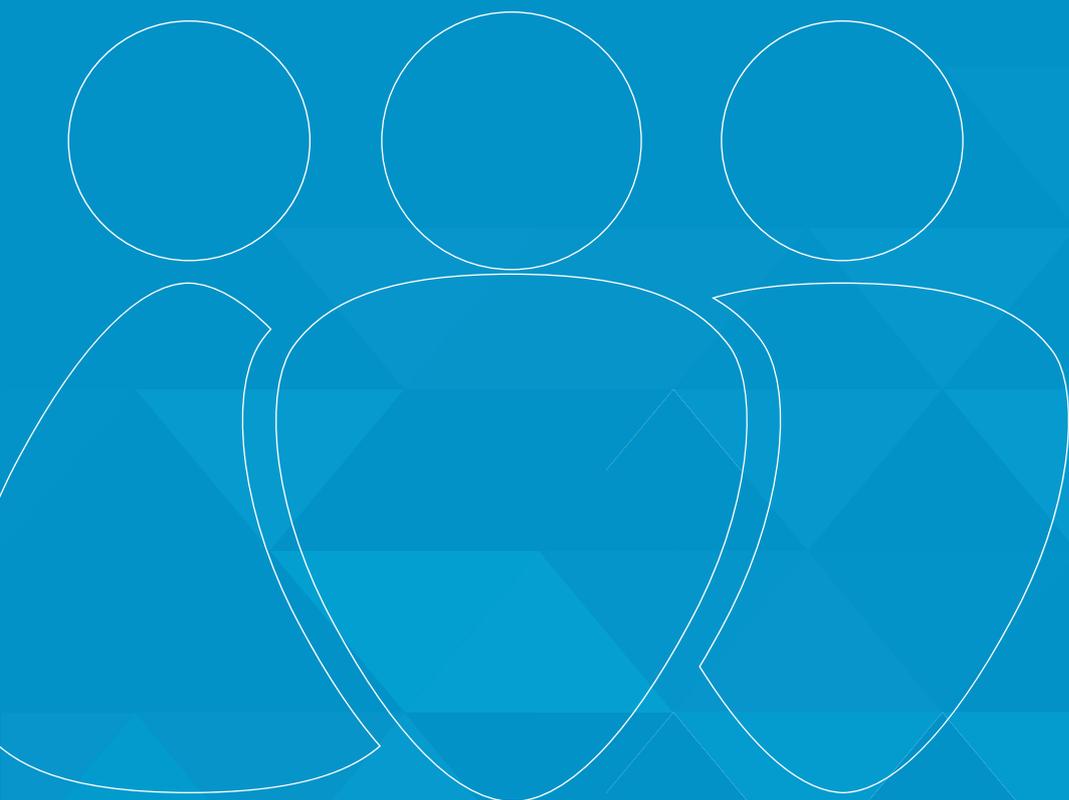
Support their colleagues in the field of media by releasing regular reports that shed light on their daily suffering and memorialize their sacrifice. Also, they should contact their families to console them.

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

Acknowledgment and Condolences

Our most heartfelt condolences go to the victims' families. We also would like to thank the friends and families of media workers who contributed effectively to this report.





@snhr



Info@sn4hr.org

www.sn4hr.org

