

17 Media Workers Killed, 21 Injured, and 12 Arrested and Abducted in Syria, Toll of the First Half of 2018

Two Media Workers Killed and Six
Arrested and Abducted, toll of June

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Wednesday, July 4, 2018

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 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 Reporters Without Borders' [Press Freedom Index for 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 June 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, 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 four accounts that we've collected through speaking directly to eyewitnesses, and are not 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. June Outline

June saw a drop in the rates of bombardments by Syrian-Russian alliance forces throughout Syria, excluding the region of south Syria which has been the target of a vicious offensive that was launched in mid-June. This drop had a notable impact on the numbers of media workers killed. On the other hand, we recorded, in June, the death of two media workers that we had listed as forcibly-disappeared persons at Syrian regime forces' detention centers. [In our special report on deaths due to torture](#), we recorded tens of cases of death due to torture inside Syrian regime forces' detention centers, where some of the families who have forcibly-disappeared relatives were informed of the death of their relatives at the Syrian regime's civil registration office, whether when they went there to finish paperwork or through lists publicized by those offices that contained names of forcibly-disappeared persons who died due to torture without specifying the cause and place of death. Also, a number of media workers were abducted and arrested in light of the security unrest that is running rampant throughout north Syria.

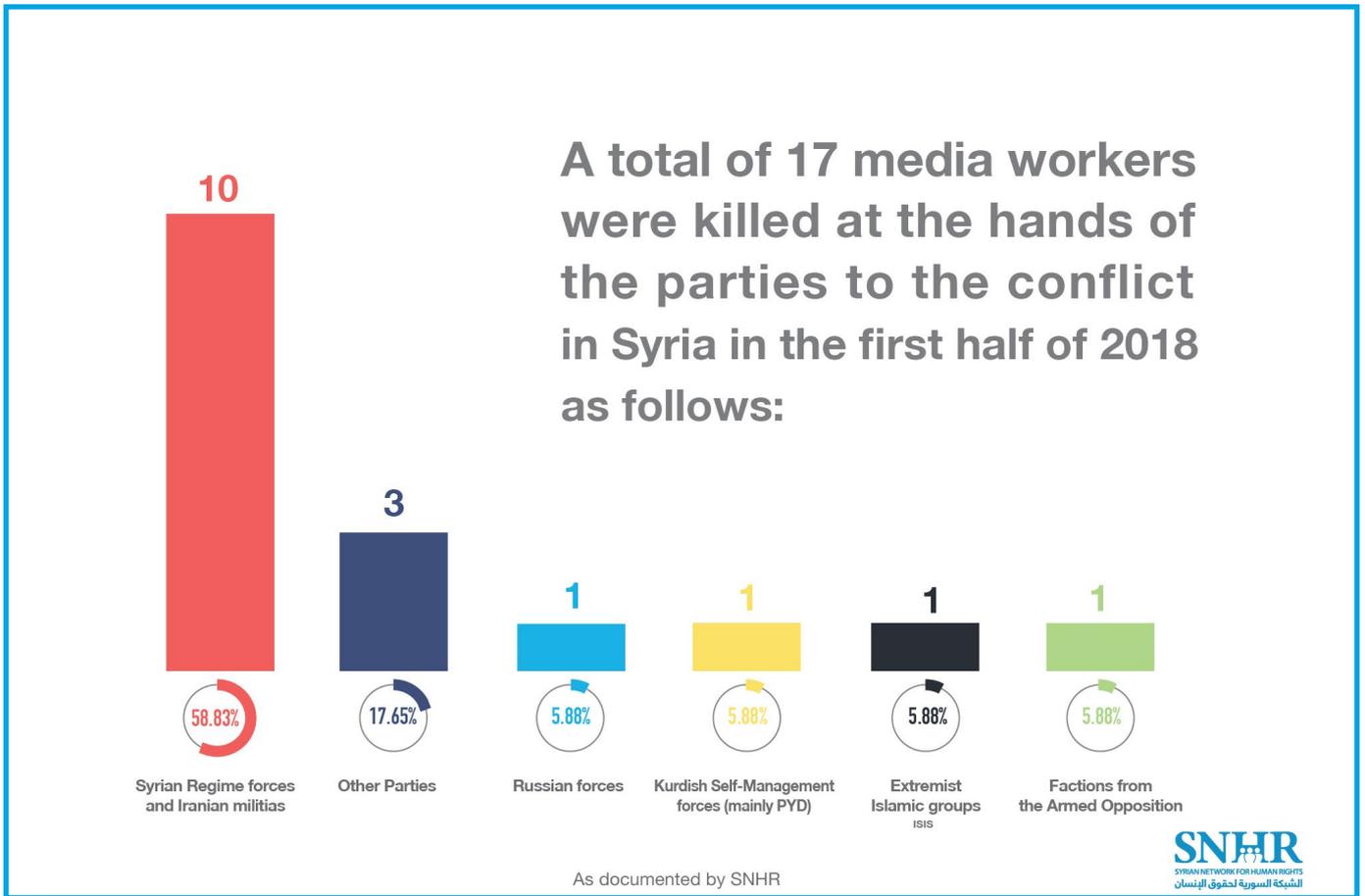
III. Executive Summary

A- Violations against media workers in the first half of 2018

Violations against media workers by the parties to the conflict in the first half of 2018 were as follows:

- **Acts of killing:** SNHR has documented that 17 media workers were killed, as follows:

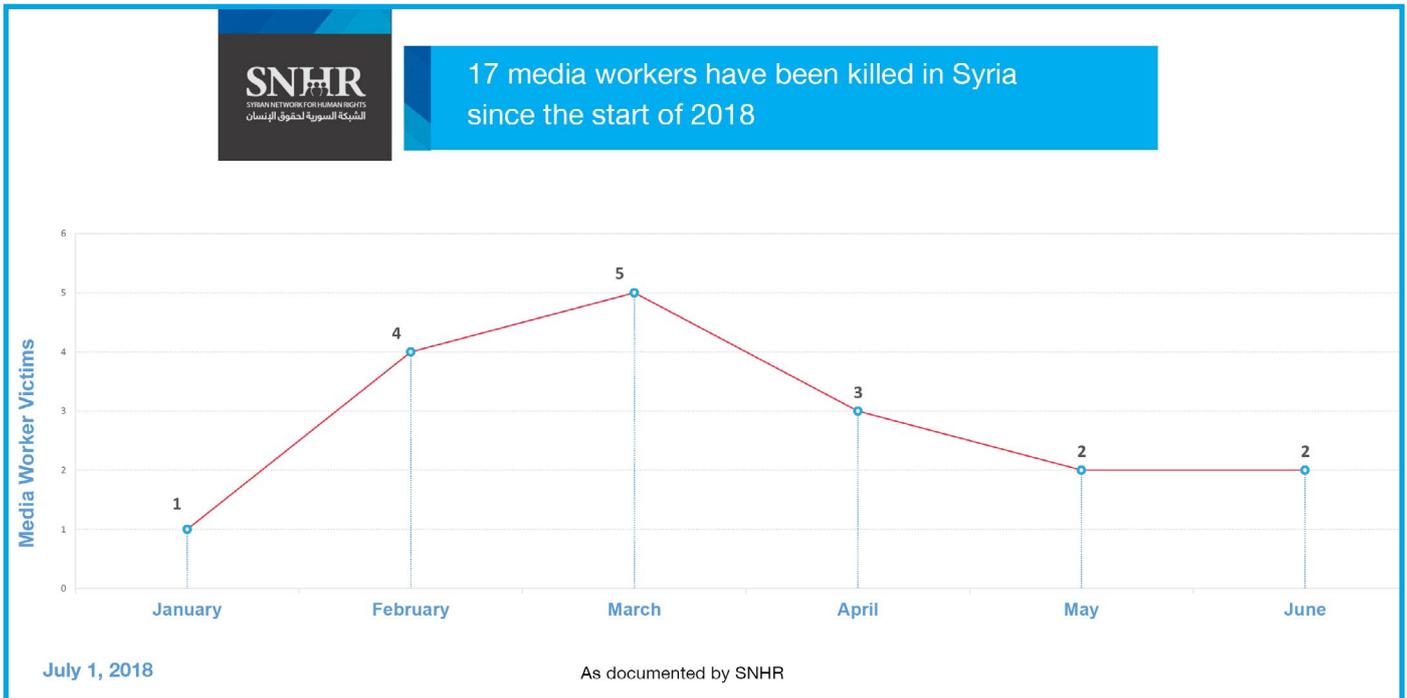




- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): 10
- Russian forces: 1
- Extremist Islamic groups: 1
 - ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State): 1
- Factions from the armed opposition: 1
- Self-Management forces (consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers’ Party): 1
- Other parties: 3



Media activists killed in the first half of 2018 were distributed by month as follows:



- **Injuries:** we've recorded that 21 media workers were injured, as follows:

- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): 9
- Russian forces: 8
- Self-Management forces (consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party): 1
- Other parties: 3

- **Arrest, abduction, and release:** we've recorded 16 cases of arrest, abduction, or release, including 1 woman, as follows:

- Extremist Islamic groups:
 - Hay'at Tahrir al sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of armed opposition factions): 2 cases of arrest
- Factions from the armed opposition: 7 cases of arrest, including 1 woman. Two of the seven detainees were released later.
- Self-Management forces (consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party): we've recorded 1 case of arrest that was released later.
- Other parties: we've recorded 2 abduction cases. One of the two abductees was set free later.



- **Other violations against media workers:** we've recorded 3 violations, as follows
- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): 2
- Other parties: 1

B- Violations against media workers in June

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

- **Acts of killing:** SNHR has documented that 2 media workers died due to torture at the hands of Syrian regime forces.
- **Arrest and release:** We've recorded 6 arrest or abduction cases as follows:
 - Extremist Islamic groups
 - Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of armed opposition factions): 1 case of arrest
 - Factions from the armed opposition: 4 cases of arrest
 - Other parties: 1 abduction case

IV. Details

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

- Acts of killing

Saed Mahmoud Balwat

Sunday, June 3, 2018. His family were informed of his death due to torture inside a detention center when they went to the civil registration office in Hama city, where the office told them that he has been dead since 2013 without disclosing the cause or place of death, or giving them a death document. It should be noted that Syrian regime forces, Air Force Intelligence branch, raided Saed's workplace and arrested him on June 6, 2011.

Saeed, independent media worker, was contracted with al Arabiya TV Channel, from Bab al Qebli neighborhood, western Hama city, born in 1983, has a degree from the Trade Institute, unmarried.



Saed Balwat



Noor AlKhateb¹, head of the detainees department at SNHR, said that she learned that many forcibly-disappeared persons are being recorded as dead at the civil registration offices thanks to her work, so she told his family to ask about him at the civil registration office in Hama, **“His aunt went there and the employee, who was female, told her that he died in 2013.”** Noor added that Saed was forcibly-disappeared by the Syrian regime, and he was seen only once by a released detainee at al Mazza Military Prison in Damascus two month after he was arrested.

Saeed Khaled al Abrash

Sunday, June 3, 2018, his family were informed of his death due to torture inside a detention center when they went to the civil registration office in Hama city, where the office told them that he died without specifying the cause, date, and place of death or giving them a death document. It should be noted that Syrian regime forces, Military Security Intelligence branch, arrested Saeed on Wednesday, February 8, 2012, from the ambulance that was transferring him to a hospital, as he was injured in the leg by a gunshot when he was covering the raid on Bab al Qebli neighborhood by Syrian regime forces in western Hama city.

Saeed, media worker, reporter for Ugarit News Network and photographer for Bab al Qebli neighborhood coordination, born in 1987, from Bab al Qebli neighborhood, has a high school diploma, unmarried.



SNHR met with Abdul Rahim al Abrash², Saeed's brother, who told us that their sister went to the civil registration office at Hama on June 3 after she heard that some forcibly-disappeared persons are being listed as dead in the civil registry, **“The employee, who was a female, told my sister that he was dead without disclosing any other details. We don't know when he died, but we continued to receive news about him until 2017. Saeed was transferred between several detention centers, where he was at the Military Security Intelligence branch in Hama, before he was transferred to branch 215 and then Saydnaya in Damascus where we never heard of him again.”** Abdul Rahim added that all the information they learned about him suggested that his health conditions were worsening.

¹ Via Facebook on June 28, 2018

² At his place of residence in Idlib city on June 5, 2018



B- Extremist Islamic groups

Hay'at Tahrir al Sham

- Arrest

Mohammad Fadl Janoudi

Monday, June 24, 2018, he was arrested by gunmen from Hay'at Tahrir al Sham near Ein al Beida Camp, which is near Bdama town, western suburbs of Idlib governorate. He was taken to one of their detention centers in western suburbs of Idlib governorate over charges of lacking a photography permit in their areas of control His fate is still unknown to SNHR as well as his family.



Mohammad Janoudi

Mohammad, known as Mohammad al Shami, reporter for Qasyoun News Agency in suburbs of Latakia governorate, from Al Najiya village, western suburbs of Idlib governorate, married and a father of two children, born in 1995.

C- Factions from the armed opposition

- Arrest

Ahmad Badawi

Saturday, June 2, 2018, armed affiliates of armed opposition factions abducted Ahmad from al Mahmoudiya neighborhood, Afrin city, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. His fate is still unknown to his family as well as SNHR.

Ahmad, known as Adam Khattab, reporter for Afrin Media Center, from Afrin city, unmarried.



Ahmad Badawi

SNHR contacted the media worker S.M.³ (his name was concealed for security reasons), a work colleague of Ahmad's, **“Adam participated in a protest in al Mahmoudiya neighborhood that was in condemnation of one of the armed factions' treatment of a civilian. On the following day, gunmen from the same faction followed him. He was last seen in front of the base of Ferqat al Hamzat's Special Operation Squad in Afrin city. ”**

³ Via Facebook on July 3, 2018



Isam al Abbas

Friday, June 22, 2018, gunmen from Lewa al Shamal, an armed opposition faction, arrested Isam in al Jat village, near al Haishariya village, eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, as he was heading for the village to shoot a report on the Turkish-American agreement in Manbij city. Al Haishariya village is the contact line between Self-Management forces and factions from the armed opposition. He was taken to a detention center for Lewa al Sultan Murad in Izaz city, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. His fate is still unknown to his family as well as SNHR.

Isam, an independent media worker, worked as a reporter for Hevi FM, from Hasaka city, born on May 20, 1980, married and a father of two children (a son and a daughter).



Radwan al Khalil

Friday, June 22, 2018, gunmen from Lewa al Shamal, an armed opposition faction, arrested Radwan in al Jat village, near al Haishariya village, eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, as he was heading for the village to shoot a report on the Turkish-American agreement in Manbij city. Al Haishariya village is the contact line between Self-Management forces and factions from the armed opposition. He was taken to a detention center for Lewa al Sultan Murad in Izaz city, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. His fate is still unknown to his family as well as SNHR.

Radwan, an independent media worker, from Hasaka city, born in 1983, unmarried.



Kinwar Khelif

Friday, June 22, 2018, gunmen from Lewa al Shamal, an armed opposition faction, arrested him in al Jat village, near al Haishariya village, eastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, as he was heading for the village to shoot a report on the Turkish-American agreement in Manbij city. Al Haishariya village is the contact line between Self-Management forces and factions from the armed opposition. He was taken to a detention center for Lewa al Sultan Murad in Izaz city, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. His fate is still unknown to his family as well as SNHR.



Kinwar, photographer with Arab 24 News Agency, from Shorek village, northern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, born in 1984, married and a father of three children.

SNHR contacted the media worker Hebar Othman⁴, reporter for Alhurra TV Channel, who was with the three media workers but managed to escape, **“As we were headed for al Haishariya village, we passed through al Sajour line, specifically al Jat village, which separates the SDF’s areas of control from the armed opposition’s areas of control. Five individuals stopped us and asked where we headed. Assuming they are civilians, we told them, but they started interrogating us and we found out that they are with the Euphrates Shield.”** Hebar added that the gunmen threatened them and pointed their shotguns at them, and asked them to get out of the car, **“They kept threatening us even though we assured them that we were journalists who work with well-known international news outlets and that we are on an official mission with Arab 24 News Agency to shoot a report on the American-Turkish agreement in al Haishariya village. We got out of the car but I was able to escape even though they heavily opened fire in my direction.”** Hebar confirmed that the incident took place in an area that is not under the control of the Euphrates Shield.

D- Other parties

- Abduction

Adam Haj Suleiman

In May 2018, he was abducted by unknown gunmen in Jisr al Shoghour city, western suburbs of Idlib governorate. We were able to confirm his abduction on Sunday, July 3, 2018, by contacting activists from the area. His fate is still unknown to SNHR as well as his family.

Adam, independent media worker, from Latakia city.



⁴ Via phone on July 3, 2018



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 on 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

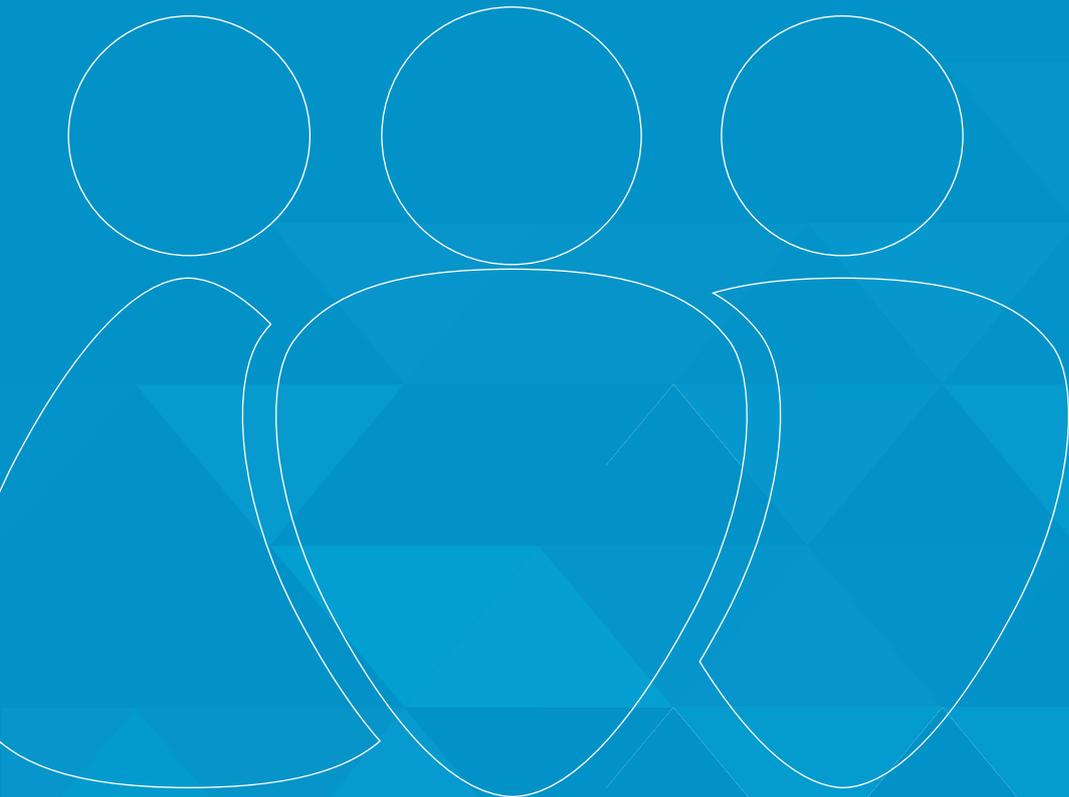
Support their colleagues in the field of media by publishing periodic reports that shed light on their daily suffering and memorialize their sacrifice. Also, they should contact their families to console them.

Finally, all parties have to respect the international humanitarian law in their areas of control in relation 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.





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