

# Three Media Activists Killed, One Injured, and Three Arrested, Toll of October 2017

ISIS Kills more Media Activists  
than any other Party

# SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Sunday, November 5, 2017

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

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 areas for the de-escalation in 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 a special 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.

Following an extensive round of talks between Russia, USA, and Jordan that commenced in May 2017 in Amman, Jordan's capital, the American and Russian presidents announced, on the sidelines of the 2017 G20 summit in Hamburg, that a ceasefire agreement has been reached in southwestern Syria – Daraa, Quneitra, and Suwayda governorates. The agreement went into force at 12:00 on Sunday July 9, 2017, and provided for the passage of humanitarian aids in addition to a ceasefire between the conflicting parties (Syrian regime forces and their allies on one side, and armed opposition factions on the other side). Also, the agreement specifies that maintaining security in this region is the Russian forces' responsibility in coordination with the Americans and Jordanians.

In addition, there have been a number of other local agreements in July and August 2017, such as Eastern Ghouta agreement between armed opposition factions, on one side, and officials from the Russian side, while a similar agreement was struck with the opposition in northern suburbs of Homs. However, the texts of these agreements haven't been made public on Russian government's websites, and the same for armed opposition factions who didn't publicize these agreements, except for Failaq al Rahman who published the [text of the agreement](#) on their official website. At the end of the agreement, according to the copy on Failaq al Rahman's website, a signature by a Russian sponsor was shown but without an explicit name, which was a grave mistake, as apparently all of this helps the sponsoring Russian side to easily dissolve from these agreements with no subsequent political or legal obligations and repercussions.

On Saturday, July 22, 2017, Russian Ministry of Defense announced that a de-escalation agreement has been signed in Eastern Ghouta following a round of talks between Russian military officials, on one side, and Jaish al Islam faction, on the other side, in Egypt's capital Cairo. The agreement was to come into effect at 12:00 of the same day. On Wednesday,



August 16, 2017, a Failaq al Rahman representative and a Russian representative signed an agreement in Geneva city that established Failaq al Rahman's inclusion in the de-escalation zone in Eastern Ghouta. The agreement was to come into effect at 21:00 of Friday, August 18, 2017.

On Monday, July 31, 2017, another de-escalation agreement was signed in Egypt's capital Cairo for northern Homs suburbs and southern Hama suburbs following a round of talks between armed opposition factions in the area and the Syrian regime represented by the Russian government as a sponsoring party, as the agreement was to commence at 12:00 on Thursday, August 3, 2017. Following the agreement's commencement, two meetings were held between a committee representing the military and civilian activities in northern suburbs of Homs and southern suburbs of Hama, on one side, and a Russian representative, on the other side, in a tent that was built for the meeting in a neutral area - near the al Dar al Kabira crossing in al Dar al Kabira village, northern suburbs of Homs governorate. The meeting was held to further discuss the provisions of Cairo's de-escalation agreement, as some armed opposition factions weren't fully in agreement with the de-escalation. Most notably, the two most recent agreements provided for a full cessation of hostilities between the conflicting parties in the relevant areas -with the exclusion of the areas in which ISIS and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham are present- and for humanitarian aids to enter these areas and for detainees to be released as per the demands of each party as to which detainees are to be released.

Since the agreements' commencement in the included areas, we have noticed a relatively good drop in the rates of killing in relation to the past 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 guarantors parties- won't see are still going on as nothing had changed.

With the end of the sixth round of talks in the Kazakhstani capital, Astana, which were held over the course of two days (September 14-15, 2017), a de-escalation zone was [established](#) in Idlib governorate and the surrounding areas, as military forces were to be deployed (Russian, Turkish, and Iranian) to monitor the agreement, with the passage of humanitarian aids.



On September 19, Syrian-Russian alliance started a heavy offensive against Idlib governorate in response to Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's "Ya Ebadallah Uthbotou" battle. Supported by some opposition faction (The Islamic Turkistani Party, Jaish al Izza, and Jaish al Nukhba), Hay'at Tahrir al Sham started this battle in northeastern Hama governorate, as they took over some villages, but Syrian regime forces, backed by Russian forces, managed to re-seize the same areas on the same day. We have released [a report](#) documenting the most notable violations of the first week of that offensive. Subsequently, these forces expanded the offensive to include the suburbs of Aleppo and Hama governorates and Eastern Ghouta in Damascus suburbs.

On October 8, 2017, Jaish al Islam, Aknaf Bait al Maqdis, and Jaish al Ababil (armed opposition factions) signed an agreement with a Russian Ministry of Defense representative in the Egyptian capital Cairo. The agreement stated that southern Damascus city would be added to the de-escalation zones, as the agreement was to come into force at 12:00 of October 12, 2017. The agreement provided for a ceasefire in the area, and ensured that the area residents would not be displaced, in addition to the passage of humanitarian aids to the area.

The Kazakhstani Minister of Foreign Affairs read the final statement of the guarantor states (Russia, Turkey, Iran) at the conclusion of the final session of Astana talks' round 7 that were held on 30th and 31st of October 2017. The guarantor states called on the parties to the conflict in Syria to take steps towards building trust, including releasing detainees and forcibly-disappeared persons, delivering dead bodies, and ensure the passage of humanitarian aids into besieged areas.

SNHR recorded that media activists are still being killed in October at the same rates, even though the perpetrator parties are different. In October, ISIS surpassed the Syrian regime, killing two media activists, whereas the Syrian regime killed one media activists. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, on the other hand, continues its oppressive policies against media activists, as the group had arrested media activists in their areas of control for the fourth month in a row.

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.



## **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.

SNHR incorporates a high-level documentation standard that draws upon direct accounts from survivors, victims' families, and local media activists, as this report includes one account. We have explained the purpose of these interviews for the witnesses who gave us permission to use the information they provided in this report without offering or giving them any incentives. Also, SNHR has tried as much as possible to spare them the agony of remembering the violations. We also gave guarantees to conceal the identities of any witnesses who preferred to use an alias. Additionally, we have analyzed and verified the pictures and videos and some of the medical records we received. We have copies of all the pictures and videos this report contains in a secret online database, as well as backup copies on hard drives. Nonetheless, we can't claim to having 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 in [documenting victims](#).

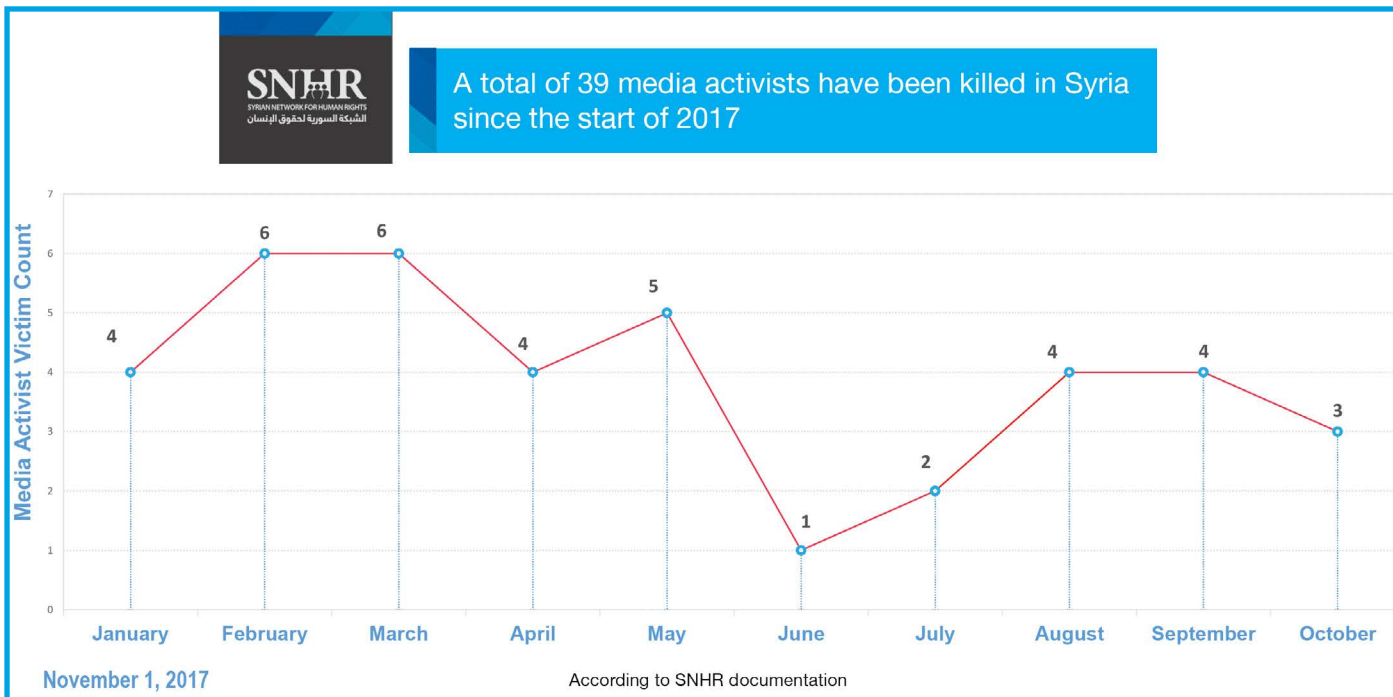
In light of the security and logistic difficulties to access all the areas where violations take place, it is worth noting that these statistics and incidents are only the bare minimum of the actual magnitude of crimes and violations that happened.



## II. Executive Summary

### A. Most notable violations against media activist in 2017

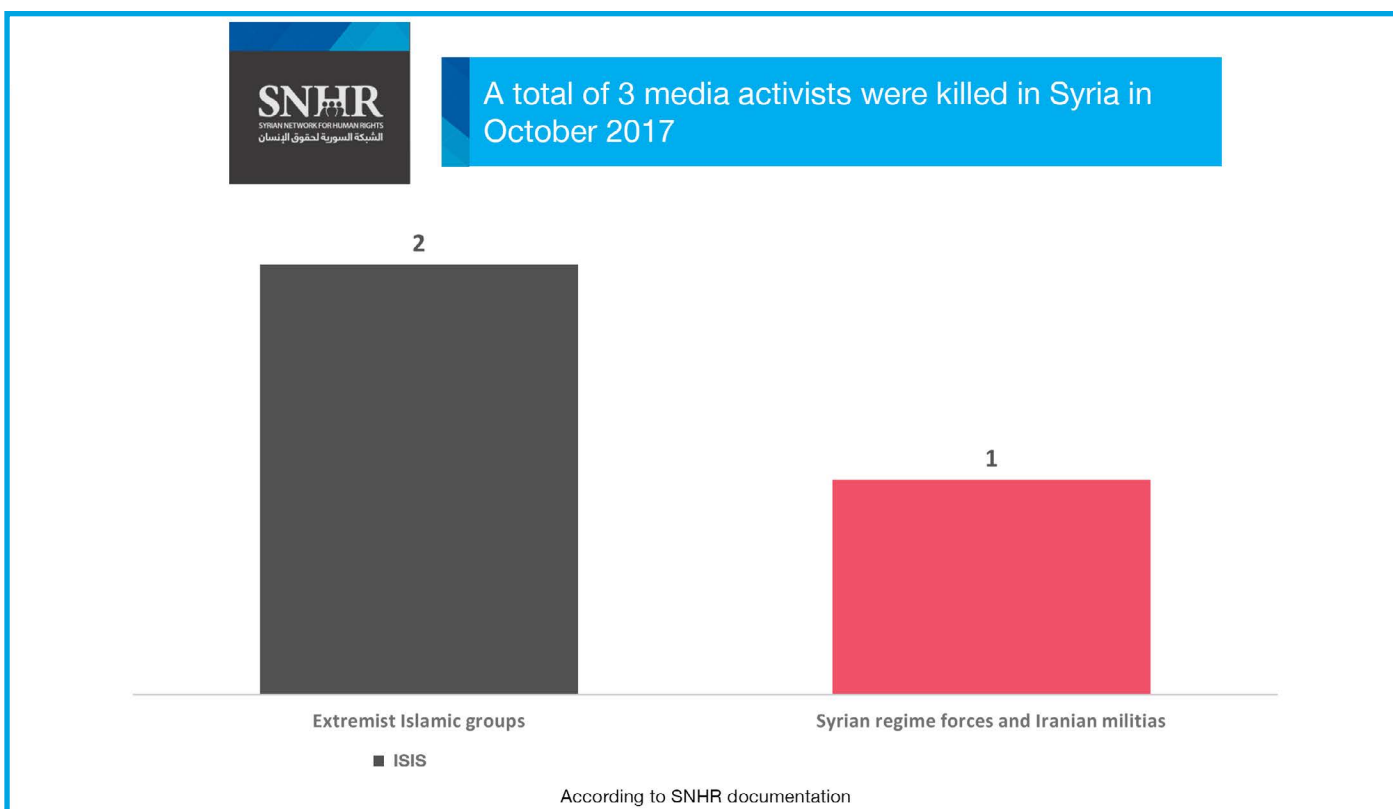
SNHR has recorded the killing of 39 media activists between the start of 2017 and November of the same year.



### B. most notable violations against media activists in October 2017

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

**- Acts of killing:** SNHR documented the killing of three media activists, including one woman (adult female).



The death toll is distributed as follows:

- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): 1
- Extremist Islamic groups:
  - ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State): 2, including one woman

- **Injuries:** we recorded that one media activist was injured by Syrian regime forces

- **Arrest and release:** we recorded seven 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): we recorded one case of arrest, where the arrested media activist was released later.

- Armed opposition factions: we recorded two cases of arrest, where the arrested media activists were released later.

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

### III. Details

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

- Acts of killing

##### **Rabea Mohammad al Jazzar**

Sunday, October 29, 2017, [he died](#) of wounds caused by shrapnel that inflicted multiple parts in [his body](#), after a [mortar](#) shell fired by Syrian regime forces artillery landed near him, as he was covering a previous shelling on Hamouriya town, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate.

Rabea, known as Qais al Qadi, reporter and head of al Jisr TV Channel office in Damascus and Damascus suburbs governorate, from Irbeen city, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, born in 1994, has an intermediate education certificate, single.



Rabea al Jazzar





SNHR contacted the media activist Suhaib al Mohammad, Qais's colleague at al Jisr TV Channel, via WhatsApp. Suhaib told us:

**“Hamouriya town was heavily shelled by Syrian regime forces artillery and rocket launchers. Rabea, along with his colleague the photographer Omar al Dimashqi, headed for the attack site to cover the shelling that was concentrated in the local market. As they were covering, a mortar shell landed near him, and the shrapnel from the shell hit Rabea in the abdomen area, face, feet, and chest. He was immediately rushed to “al Khamsin” medical point in the town, and then to “al Zir” medical point, where he died. Omar, on the other hand, only sustained wounds in his feet caused by shrapnel from the shell. The shelling resulted in the killing of eight civilians, in addition to damaging a number of residential buildings and shops to various degrees.”**

- Injuries

**Omar al Dimashqi “his real name is concealed for security concern”**

Sunday, October 29, 2017, Omar [was injured](#) in his feet after a mortar shell fired by Syrian regime forces artillery landed near him, as he was covering a previous shelling on Hamouriya town, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate.

Omar, [a photographer for al Jisr TV Channel](#), from Irbeen city, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, born in 1994, has an intermediate education certificate, single. Suhaib Mohammad confirmed that Omar was injured in his account of Rabea's Death.



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

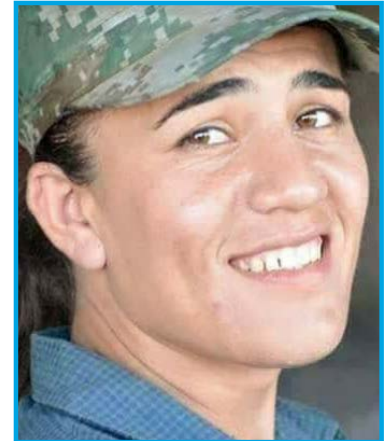
### **- ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State)**

#### **- Acts of killing**

#### **Dleishan Ebish**

Thursday, October 12, 2017, she [was killed](#) in a car bombing by an ISIS suicidal bomber that was driving the car, as [he targeted](#) a gathering of IDPs from [Deir Ez-Zour](#) governorate near the Kurdish-majority Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Abu Fas area, southern suburbs of Hasaka governorate.

Dleishan, [a reporter for the Kurdish group Hawar News Agency](#) (ANHA), from Ein al Arab city, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, born in 1993, a university student at the Technical Institute for Business Management and Marketing.



Dleishan Ebish

#### **Houkar Faisal Mohammad**

Sunday, October 15, 2017, he died of wounds sustained on Thursday, October 12, 2017, in a car bombing by an ISIS suicidal bomber who drove the car into a IDPs gathering from Deir Ez-zour governorate near a checkpoint for the Kurdish majority SDF in Abu Fas area, southern suburbs of Hasaka governorate.

Houkar, [a reporter and photographer for the Kurdish group Hawar News Agency](#) (ANHA), from al Qameshli, north-eastern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, born in 1991.



Houkar Mohammad



## **- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of armed opposition factions)**

- Arrest and release

### **Mustafa Haj Ali**

Saturday, October 14, 2017, Mustafa was arrested by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham in Idlib city, and his media equipment were seized. He was taken to a detention center for the group in Idlib city, for recording the demonstration without a permit. He was released an hour later after he signed a pledge to abstain from recording without a security clearance from Idlib administration and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham security forces.

[Mustafa Haj Ali](#), head of the media department at the Education Administration in Idlib city, from al Nayrab village, northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in 1985.

## **C. Violations by armed opposition factions**

- Arrest and release

### **Ali Baker**

Thursday, October 26, 2017, Ali was arrested by fighters from Failaq al Rahman, an armed opposition faction, in Kafr Batna town, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. He was taken to a detention center for the group in Ein Tarma town, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. Ali was released on the next day.

Ali Baker, a reporter for al Ghouta Media Center, has a degree in trade and economics, from Hazza town, east of Damascus suburbs governorate, born in 1989.



Ali Baker

### **Anas Abu Ayman**

Thursday, October 26, 2017, he was arrested by fighters from Failaq al Rahman, an armed opposition faction, from Kafr Batna town, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. He was taken to a detention center for the group in Ein Tarma town, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. Anas was released on the next day.

Anas Abu Ayman, a reporter for al Ghouta Media Center, from Kafr Batna town, born in 1994.



Anas Abu Ayman



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

- Release

### **Ibrahim Ali Suliman**

Tuesday, October 3, 2017, Ibrahim was released by Self-Management forces, as we had released documented his arrest by the same forces on Friday, September 15, 2017, from his place of residence in [al Shadadi city](#), southern suburbs of Hasaka governorate. Ibrahim Ali al Suliman, a reporter for Fourat Post Institution, from Deir Ez-Zour city.

## **IV.Recommendations**

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

Condemn the targeting of media activists in Syria and shed 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.

### **The Russian guarantor**

- The Syrian regime has to be stopped from dooming the de-escalation agreements. Otherwise, it will only be seen as an exchange of roles between the Russian regime, on one side, and the Syrian/Russian alliance on the other side.
- Start making progress in the detainees issue by revealing the fates of 76,000 forcibly-disappeared persons at the hands of the Syrian regime.

### **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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