

Four Media Workers Killed and Five Injured, Toll of February 2018

Syrian Regime Forces Kill
Two Media Workers in
Eastern Ghouta



Sunday, March 4, 2018

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

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](#), who described Syria as "the world's deadliest country for journalists."

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 no 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 February 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 10 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 assurances to conceal the identity of any witness who preferred to use an alias.

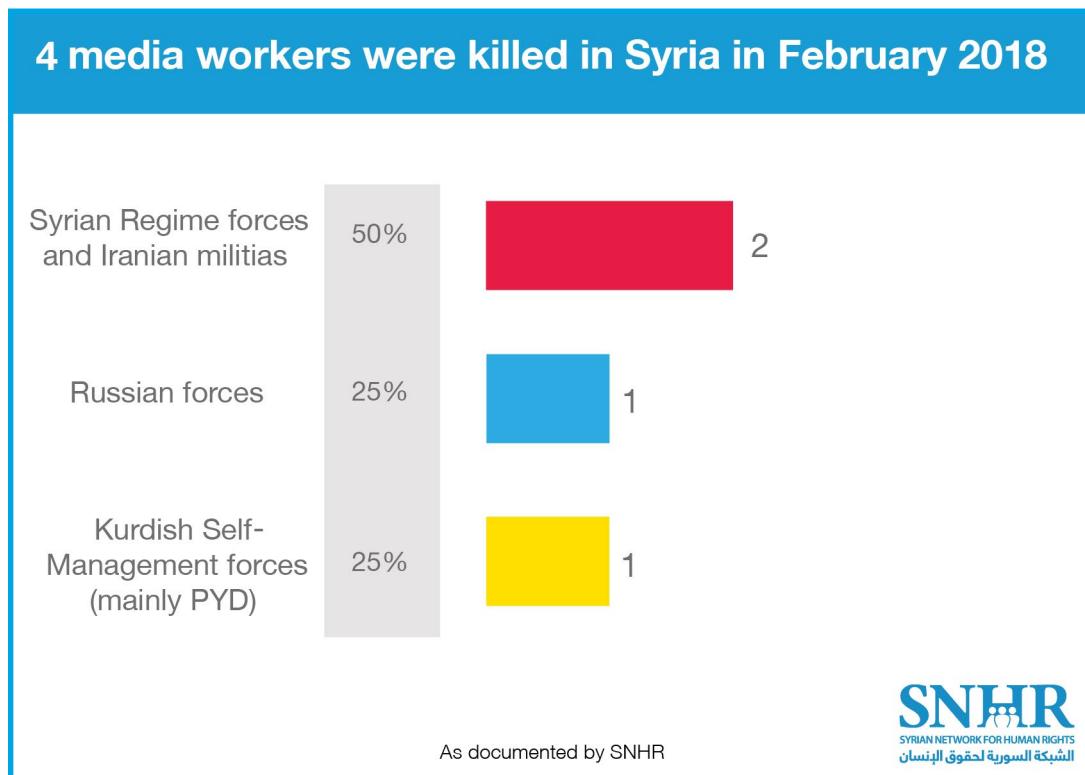


The report might include incidents that we believe do not constitute violations of the international humanitarian law. We include it, however, to preserve the truth historically and store it as a national record, but we don't describe it as having qualified as crimes.

II. Executive Summary

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

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



- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): 2
 - Russian forces: 1
 - Self-Management forces (consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party): 1
- Injuries:** we have recorded that five media workers were injured, as follows:
- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): 3
 - Russian forces: 2
- Arrest and release:** We've recorded one arrest case where the detained media worker was released later by Kurdish Self-Management forces



- **Other violations against media workers:** we have recorded two attacks, as follows:
 - Syrian regime forces: 1 attack on a live-broadcast vehicle
 - Other parties: 1 attack on a media worker

III. Details

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

- Acts of killing

Khaled Jamal Hammo

Saturday, February 17, 2018, [Khaled died of injuries](#) in most of his body caused by shrapnel, as a surface-to-surface rocket fired by a Syrian regime forces rocket launcher landed in a market in Douma city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Khaled, [head of the audio](#) office at Syrian Scene Agency, and a radio host at al Islam Radio, from Douma city, born in 1991, had an intermediate education certificate, married and a father of two children.

Ammar Hammo¹, Khaled's cousin, told us that he learned from his family that a surface-to-surface rocket landed near Khaled as he was in the market: **"The shrapnel wounded most parts of his body, and particularly the upper half of his body, especially his head. He was transferred to a medical point where he died."**



Khaled Hammo

Abdul Rahman Ismail al Yassin

Tuesday, February 20, 2018, Abdul Rahman was [fatally injured](#) by shrapnel in his right thigh and lungs in a bombing by fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes who fired a missile that landed near him, as he was covering a previous bombing by the same warplanes on Hamouriya town, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident. Abdul Rahman, a photographer for Hamouriya Media Office, from Hamouriya town, born in 1988, has an intermediate education certificate, married and a father of two.



Abdul Rahman al Yassin

¹ We contacted him via Facebook on February 24, 2018



We contacted Abdul Salam Hamza², a media worker, who told us that his colleague Abdul Rahman was in the vicinity of Dar al Shefaa Hospital documenting the bombardment there when the warplanes carried out another airstrike: “**Abdul Rahman was hit by a number of shrapnel in different parts of his body. One of the shrapnel hit his femoral artery while another got into his lungs. He was rushed to Dar al Shefaa Hospital where he died.**”

- Injuries

Mohammad Saleh Abdul Rahman

Wednesday, February 7, 2018, Mohammad was [injured by shrapnel in his face](#) and right foot in a bombing by fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes who fired a missile that landed near him as he was covering a previous bombing by the same warplanes in Douma city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Mohammad, [a reporter for Orient TV Channel](#), from Douma city, Damascus suburbs governorate, born in 1985, has a diploma in rehabilitation and majored in translation and localization at the college of literature and human sciences – department of French language, married and a father of two children.

Mohammad told us³ that he was recording the aftermath of the bombardment on Halab Street in Douma city when the Syrian warplanes returned and carried out another airstrike: “**The missile landed near me and the shrapnel wounded me in my face and my right foot. I was taken to the Central Hospital in the city where they performed first-aid. I didn't stay for long, as my injuries weren't serious.**” Mohammad added that the same bombardment resulted in the killing of a number of civilians and wounded around 30 others.



Mohammad Abdul Rahman

Ahmad al Dimashqi “his real name was concealed for security concerns”

Wednesday, February 7, 2018, [he sustained bruises](#) in the head, foot, and left hand in a bombing by fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes who fired a missile near him as he was covering the bombing on Douma city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Ahmad, a reporter for Shahba Press Agency, from Douma city, has an elementary education certificate, unmarried.



Ahmad al Dimashqi

² We contacted him via Facebook on February 22, 2018

³ We contacted him via Facebook on February 13, 2018



On February 22, 2018, we contacted Ahmad⁴ who confirmed that he was injured in a bombing by fixed-wing Syrian regime warplanes: “**I was rushed to a medical center and I left because the center was overly crowded and there were fears that it might be bombed. A paramedic came to my home and bandaged my wounds.**” Ahmad added that the bombing resulted in the killing of a number of civilians and heavy damages to the buildings.

Maher Abdul Aziz

Monday, February 19, 2018, [Maher was injured](#) by [shrapnel in his head](#) and [right thigh](#) as a [surface-to-surface](#) rocket was fired by a Syrian regime forces rocket launcher at the live-broadcast vehicle on Hamouriya-Misraba road in Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

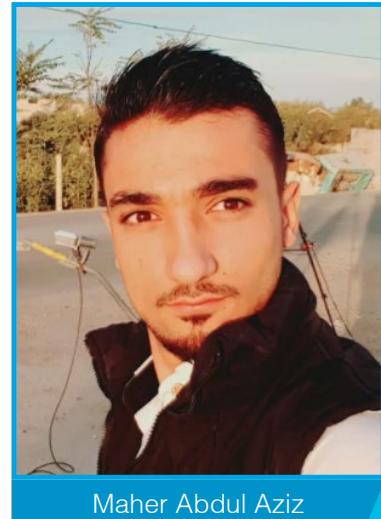
Maher, the engineer of the live-broadcast vehicle which belonging to Orient TV Channel, from Douma city, born in 1994, a first-year university student at the faculty of architecture, married.

Maher confirmed⁵ to us that he was injured as he was leaving a recording site with the live-broadcast vehicle where a surface-to-surface rocket landed near the vehicle: “**The shrapnel wounded my head and right thigh, so I left the car immediately. Fortunately, I was able to get away before a second rocket hit the vehicle and destroyed it almost completely.**” Maher added that it took the medical teams about three hours to arrive: “**I was transferred to a medical point in Hamouriya where I, along with a civilian who was with us, received the necessary treatment.**”

- Other violations against media workers

Orient TV’s live-broadcast vehicle

Monday, February 19, 2018, a surface-to-surface rocket was fired at Orient TV’s live-broadcast vehicle by a Syrian regime forces rocket launcher on Hamouriya-Misraba road, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. The vehicle was destroyed almost completely and was rendered out of commission. The area was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Maher Abdul Aziz

⁴ We contacted him via Facebook on February 22, 2018

⁵ We contacted him via Facebook on February 22, 2018



B. Russian forces

Acts of killing

Foad Mohammad al Hussein

Tuesday, February 6, 2018, [Foad died of injuries](#) caused by shrapnel in a bombing by fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian that fired a missile that landed near him in his village Termalla, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Foad, a reporter for Event News Agency, from Termalla village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in 1986, has a diploma from the college of literature and human sciences – faculty of Arabic language, married and a father of two children.

We contacted⁶ the media worker Abdul Majid al Omar , a friend of Foad's, who told us that Russian warplanes carried out an airstrike in the vicinity of the Grand Mosque in Termalla around 07:30. **“The missile landed near Foad and his head was fatally injured by the shrapnel. He died as he was at Kafranbel Hospital”** Abdul Majid added that the bombardment resulted in the killing of a number of civilians and wounded others on that day.

- Injuries

Walid Saeed al Rashed

Wednesday, February 7, 2018, [Walid was injured](#) in both of [his knees](#) by shrapnel in [a bombing](#) by fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian who fired a missile that landed [near him](#) as he was covering the bombardment on al Gharbi neighborhood in Ma'aret al Nu'man city, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Walid, a photographer for al Ma'ara Media Center, from Ma'aret al Nu'man city, born in 1996, a first-year university student at the faculty of law, unmarried.



Foad al Hussein



Walid al Rashed

⁶ We contacted him via Facebook on February 12, 2018



We contacted the media worker Abdul Aziz Qetaz⁷, a colleague of Walid's, who confirmed that Walid was severely injured in the knees in an airstrike by fixed-wing Russian warplanes that targeted al Gharbi neighborhood in Ma'aret al Nu'man city: **"Walid was documenting the bombardment in the area and he was rushed to Sham Surgical Hospital in Has town. He was then transferred to Turkey to continue his treatment on account of his serious injuries."**

Ahmad Khaled Bakir

Thursday, February 8, 2018, he sustained scars in most of his body in a bombing by fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian who fired a missile near him as he was covering the extraction of dead bodies in the aftermath of a bombing by the same warplanes on the First-Aid Health Center in Mashmashan village, western suburbs of Idlib governorate. The village was under the joint control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and the Islamic Turkistani Party at the time of the incident.

Ahmad, a media worker and photographer for the civil defense's al Jabal al Wastani center, from al Sukkariya village, western suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in 1991, a fourth-year university student at the faculty if media, married and a father of three.

We contacted Ahmad⁸ and he told us that the Russian warplanes conducted a double strike near Mashmashan Dispensary as he was covering the civil defense's rescue efforts in the site of the first attack: **"I was injured as well as a number of civil defense members. My injuries were concentrated in the head, and my ears bled. I was transferred to al Bashiriya Hospital where I received treatment."** Ahmad added that the bombardment resulted in casualties and injuries, as well as heavy damages to Mashmashan Dispensary building and Mashmashan High School for Girls.



Ahmad Bakir

⁷ We contacted him via WhatsApp on February 20, 2018

⁸ We contacted him via WhatsApp on February 20, 2018



C. Self-Management forces (primarily consisting of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party)

- Acts of killing

Mustafa Mohammad Khattab

Tuesday, February 20, 2018, [Mustafa died](#) of injuries caused by shrapnel in most of his body, as a directed missile fired by a missile base belonging to the Self-Management forces landed near him as he was covering clashes between Self-Management forces and factions from the armed opposition on the battlefield of Bulbul county in the suburbs of Ifreen city, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, as part of Operation Olive Branch.

Mustafa, [a photographer for Ferqat al Hamza](#), an armed opposition faction, from Kafr Aweed village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in 1997, has an intermediate education certificate, unmarried.

Sharif al Damlakhi⁹ , a friend of Mustafa's and a media worker, told us: "**The missile that was fired by the Kurdish forces landed in the location where Mustafa was covering the clashes, and killed him immediately.**" Sharif added that one of Ferqat al Hamza fighters was killed too in the same shelling.

- Arrest and release

Alan Salim Ahmad

Monday, August 15, 2016, Alan was arrested by Self-Management forces in al Qamishli city, suburbs of Hasaka governorate. He was released on Tuesday, February 13, 2018. It should be noted that we haven't been able to document his arrest until he was released.

Alan Salim Ahmad, a report for Yeketi Media Website, a first-year university student at the faculty of law, from al Qamishli city, northern suburbs of Hasaka governorate.



Mustafa Khattab



Alan Ahmad

⁹ We contacted him via WhatsApp on February 25, 2018



D. Other parties

- Violations against other media workers

Mohammad Sbieh

Wednesday, February 28, 2018, armed men assaulted Mohammad at the intersection of al Sheikh Dames town, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, and confiscated his laptop and mobile phone.

Mohammad, an independent media worker who worked formerly with Madar al Yaum Website, Tajamou Saned al Haq Wal al Hurriya, and Aleppo News Network, from Kafr Sajna village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in 1992.



Mohammad Sbieh

Mohammad¹⁰ told us: “**As I was returning from Hish town, southern Idlib, around 21:00, an armed group of eight people stopped me at the intersection of al Sheikh Dames town between Kafr Sajna village and Hish town. One of them asked for my I.D. and I told him I don't have it with me. He asked me: ‘are you the media worker Mohammad Sbieh’ and I said yes, and then they started beating me with weapons on my back and chest, and he said: ‘This is for reporting our news to foreign parties’.**” Mohammad added that they left him after confiscating his equipment: “**I can't accuse anyone in particular, but the area where the assault took place is under the control of the Syrian Liberation Front.**”

IV. 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.

¹⁰ We contacted him via Facebook on February 22, 2018



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

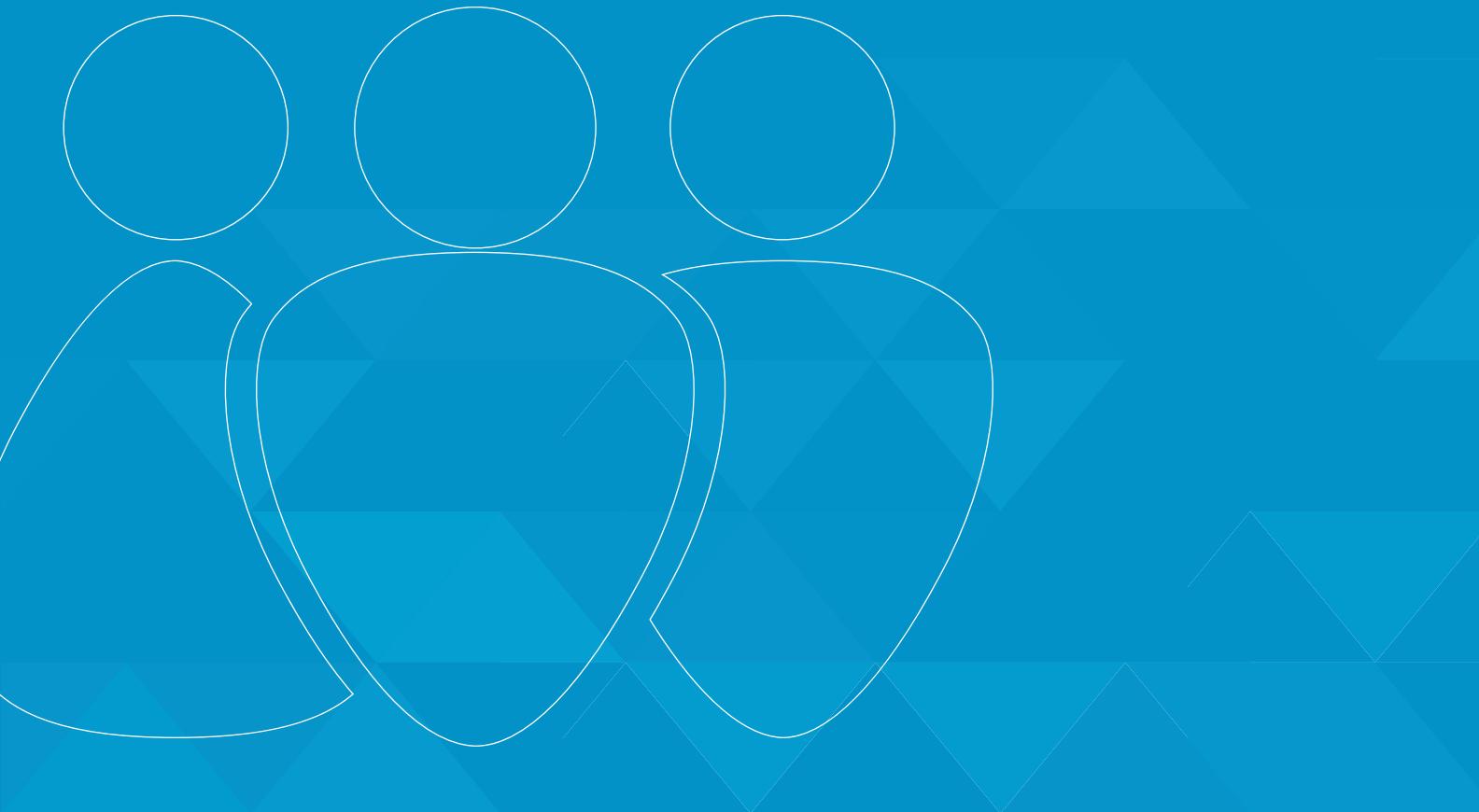
Support their colleagues in the field of media by publishing periodic reports that shed light on their daily suffering and memorialize their sacrifice. Also, they must contact their families to console them.

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.





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