

42 Media Activist Killed, 47 Injured, and 93 Arrested and Abducted in Syria, Toll of 2017

Two Media Activists Killed and Four
Arrested in December

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

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.”



On December 30, 2016, a comprehensive ceasefire was announced from the Turkish capital Ankara under a Russian-Turkish sponsorship. The signing parties, the Syrian regime on one side and armed opposition factions on the other side, agreed to cease all armed attacks, including airstrikes, and stop raids and on-the-ground advancements. The military areas controlled by ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State) were excluded from the agreement.

Ankara Ceasefire Agreement was followed by seven rounds of talks that were held in Astana, Kazakhstan's capital, between Russian, Turkish, and Iranian representatives as the states who sponsored Ankara Ceasefire Agreement. These rounds -the most recent of which was on October 30-31, 2017- discussed mostly, in parallel with a number of local agreements, ways to further establish de-escalation zones in Idlib governorate and the surrounding areas (parts of Aleppo, Hama, and Latakia governorates), northern Homs governorate, Eastern Ghouta, and parts of Daraa and Quneitra governorates in south Syria. Additionally, the talks addressed ways to deliver humanitarian aids and enable IDPs to return to those areas. Since these agreements went into effect, the included areas saw a relatively good and noticeable drop in killing rates in relation to the past months since March 2011.

Despite Ankara Ceasefire Agreement and the de-escalation agreements that followed, 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- won't see are still going on as nothing had changed.

The Russian guarantor should respect the agreements they struck and apply serious pressure on their Syrian and Iranian allies in order to cease all forms of killing, shelling, and torture-to-death inside detention centers, and start releasing detainees – an issue that has not seen any notable progress so far.

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 citizen 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 citizen 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 citizen 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 two accounts. 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](#).

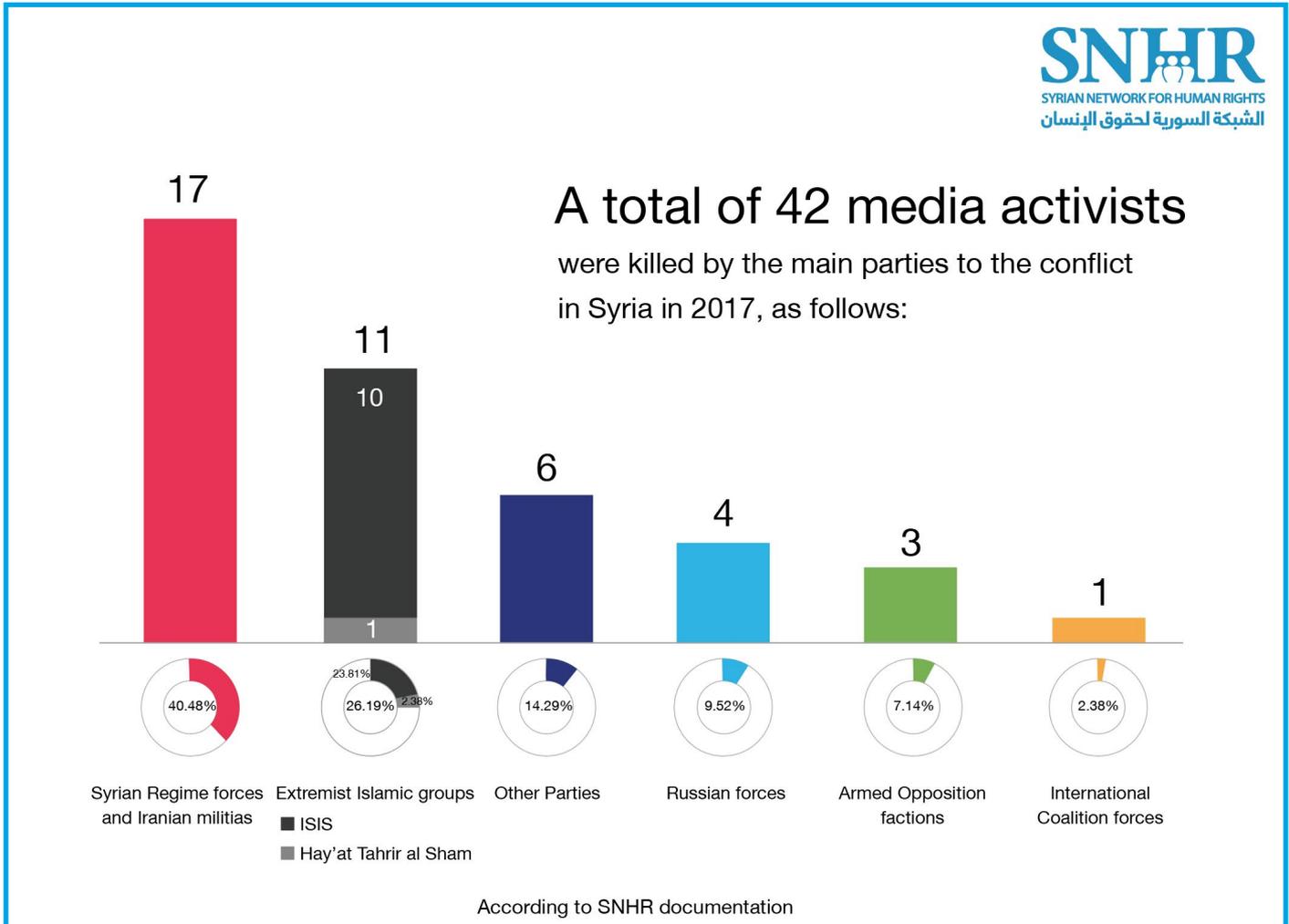
In light of the security and logistic difficulties to access all the areas where violations take place, it is worth noting that these statistics and incidents are only the bare minimum of the actual magnitude of crimes and violations that happened.



II. Executive Summary

A. Most notable violations against media activists in 2017

1- Killing: SNHR has recorded the killing of 42 media activists, including one child and one woman



Distributed as follows:

- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias): 17

- Russian forces: 4

- Extremist Islamic groups:

ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State): 10, including 1 child and 1 woman (adult female)
Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of factions from the armed opposition): 1

- Armed opposition factions: 3

- International coalition forces: 1

- Other parties: 6



2- Injuries: We recorded 47 injuries, distributed as follows:

- Syrian regime forces: 29
- Russian forces: 8
- Extremist Islamic groups:
ISIS: 6
- Armed opposition factions: 1
- Other parties: 3

3- Arrest, abduction, and release: we recorded 93 cases of arrest, abduction, and release

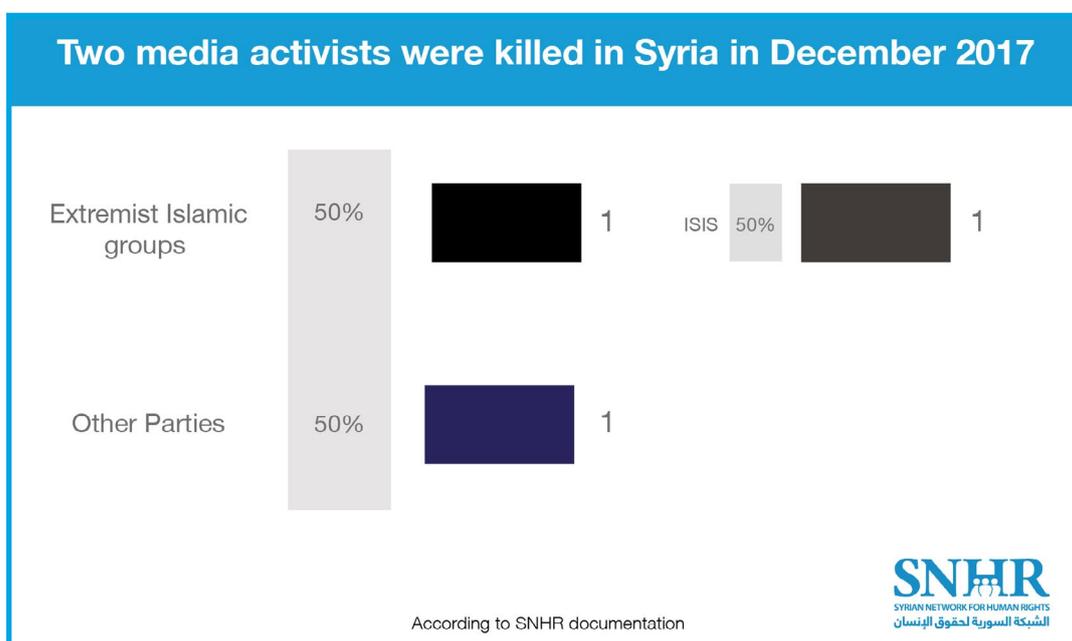
- Syrian regime forces: we recorded six cases of arrest, including two women
- Extremist Islamic groups:
ISIS: we recorded one case of arrest
Hay'at Tahrir al Sham: we recorded 19 cases of arrest, including 18 that were released.
- Armed opposition factions: we recorded 10 cases of arrest, including nine that were released.
- Kurdish Self-Management forces (primarily consisting of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party): we recorded 11 cases of arrest, including 10 that were released.
- Other parties: we recorded five abduction cases, including four that were released, by parties we weren't able to identify.

4- Other violations against media activists: we recorded three attacks on media offices by Syrian regime forces.

B. most notable violations against media activists in December 2017

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

- **Acts of killing:** SNHR documented the killing of two media activists



Distributed as follows:

- Extremist Islamic groups:

ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State): killed one media activist

- Other parties: killed one media activist

- **Arrest and release:** we recorded seven cases, as follows:

- Syrian regime forces: we recorded one case of arrest

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

- Self-Management forces: we recorded one case of arrest, where the arrested media activist was released later.

III. Details

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

- Arrest

Murhaf al Shaer

Thursday, December 21, 2017, he was arrested by Syrian regime forces at a checkpoint as he was heading for Lebanon. His fate is still unknown to SNHR as well as his family.

Murhaf al Shaer, an editor for al Suwayda Newspaper, from Bosan village, western suburbs of al Suwayda governorate.



Murhaf al Shaer

B. Extremist Islamic groups

ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State)

Acts of killing

Rezkar Adanamesh

Monday, December 18, 2017, he died of wounds sustained on Thursday, October 12, 2017, in [a car bombing](#) that was operated by an ISIS suicidal bomber who targeted a group of IDPs from Deir Ez-Zour governorate near a checkpoint for the Kurdish-majority SDF in Abu Fas area, southern suburbs of Hasaka governorate.

Rezkar, known as Rezkar Daniz, reporter for Hawar News Agency (ANHA), Turkish, from Serat city, Turkey, born in 1991, has a degree from the faculty of media according to an [obituary](#) on him published by the agency.



Rezkar Adanamesh



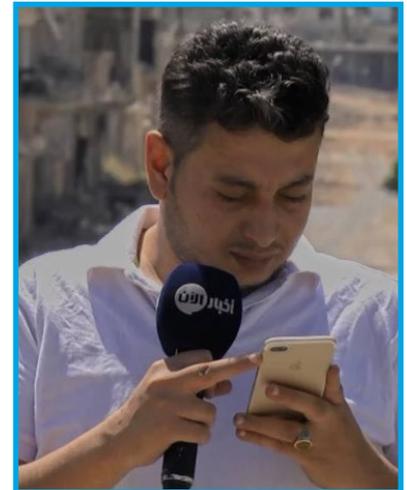
C. Armed opposition factions

Arrest and release

Mohammad Haitham Ghazzawi

Monday, December 11, 2017, he was arrested by fighters from Shabab al Sunna, an armed opposition faction, in Bosra al Sham city, eastern suburbs of Daraa governorate. He was released on the same day.

Mohammad, known as Mohammad al Hourani, a reporter for al Aan TV Channel in Daraa governorate, from al Sheikh Maskin city, suburbs of Daraa governorate, born in 1989.



Mohammad al Ghazzawi

We contacted Mohammad¹ who told us that he headed on December 11, to Bosra al Sham to answer an invitation he received from the media officer at Shabab al Sunna forces, who is known as “Abu Ghazi”, to cover a seminar conducted by the community police: **“I arrived an nearly 13:00 to Qal’at Bosra al Sham, where Shabab al Sunna’s media office is located, to meet Abu Ghazi. The guards told me he wasn’t there, so I called him to find out where he is. He told me that he is at home. However, the guards took me inside and took my personal items and started insulting me and asking me why I criticized and badmouthed their leader, Ahmad Haitham al Ouda or “Abu Hamza”, and I told him that I talked to their leader and explained myself to him.”** Mohammad added that they didn’t stop there: **“They forced me to take off my clothes, arrested me, and took picture of me in inappropriate poses. I was transferred to another prison where they beat me so I agree to appear in a video confessing to possessing and dealing drugs in armed opposition-held areas under the Syrian regime’s instructions.”** Mohammad added that he was released around 16:40 after they threatened that they will publish the pictures and videos if he speaks out about what happened to him.

¹ We contacted him via Facebook on December 20, 2017



Anas al Khouli

Friday, December 29, 2017, he was arrested by fighters from Failaq al Rahman, an armed opposition faction, from Saqba city, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. He was taken to one of their detention centers in Saqba city. He was released after being detained for 18 hours.

Anas, an independent media activist, from Misraba city, eastern suburbs of Damascus suburbs governorate, born in 1992.



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

Arrest and release

Aboud Mohammad Hamam

Saturday, December 16, 2017, he was arrested by Self-Management forces in al Intifada neighborhood in the middle of Raqqa city. They confiscated his personal laptop and photography equipment. He was released on Friday, December 22, 2017.

Aboud Mohammad Hamam, an independent photographer in Raqqa city, cooperates with Reuters News Agency, from al Jarniya town, western suburbs of Raqqa governorate, born in 1970.



Aboud Hamam ² told us that masked gunmen raided his house at nearly 01:00 AM and confiscated some of his equipment, before taking him: **“I learned that they are with the Kurdish Intelligence. They kept me in one of their buildings, before transferring me the next day to Raqqa Prison where I stayed for seven days without being interrogated.”** Aboud added that he was released thanks to mediators: **“I found out that I was arrested for possessing a satellite transmitter device even though I had it officially licensed.”**

² We contacted him via Facebook on December 25, 2017



E. Other parties

Acts of killing

Karam Absi Qabbisho

Friday, December 29, 2017, Sama TV Channel [mourned](#) Karam who was killed as he [was covering](#) the clashes between Syrian regime forces, on one side, and armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, on the other side, on the battlefield of Um Hartin, suburbs of Idlib governorate where a shell landed [near the channel team](#) who were accompanying Syrian regime forces. As of this writing, we have yet to determine the source of the shell.

Karam, [photographer](#) for Sama TV channel, from Idlib governorate, born in 1995.



Karam Qabbisho

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

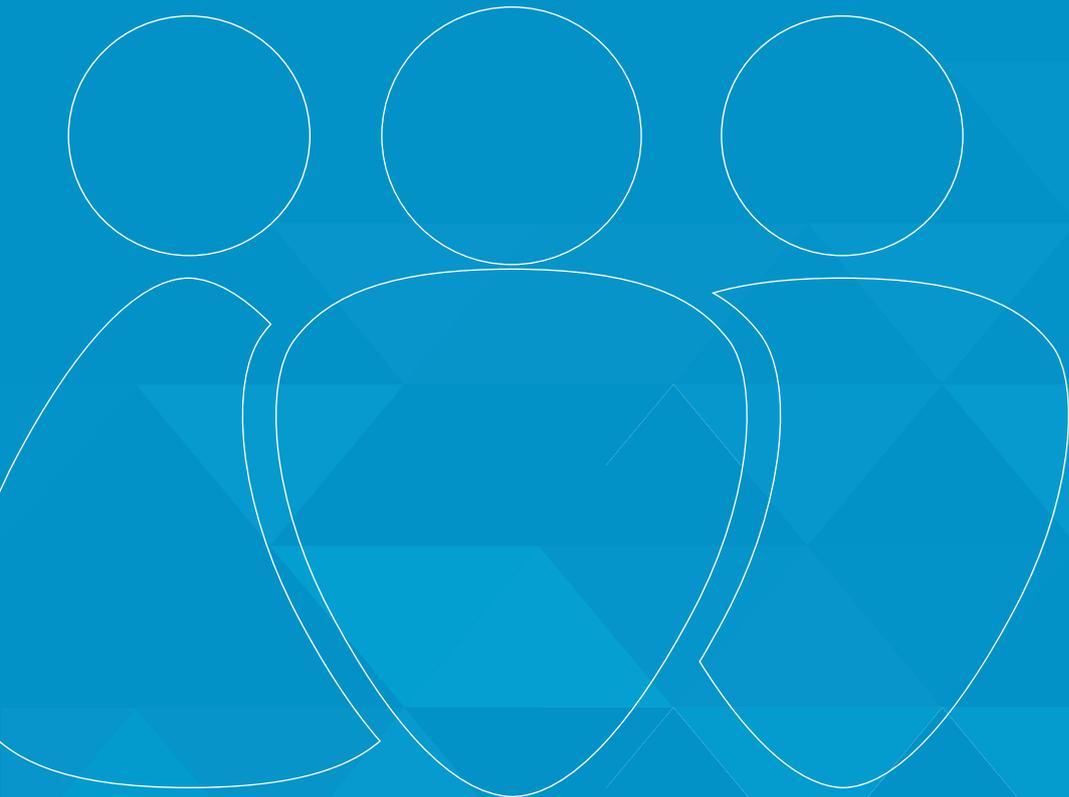
Advocate their colleagues in the field of media by publishing periodic reports that shed light on their daily suffering and memorialize their sacrifice. Also, they must contact their families to console them.

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

Our most heartfelt condolences for the victims' families and our thanks for the families and friends of media activists who contributed effectively to this report.





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