A Demand That Journalist Majed Shamaa Not Be Returned to Syria Because It Is an Unsafe Country

Majed Shamaa Has Criticized Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Meaning He Faces a Severe Threat If He Returns

A number of Syrians have published satirical videos on social media, in response to what has become known as the 'banana issue,' which began after a simple statement by a Turkish citizen on a TV program claiming that he was unable to buy and eat bananas, while Syrian refugees can.

In mid-October, an Orient Network TV show included a brief satirical sketch addressing the banana issue, featuring the channel's journalist Abdul Majed Shamaa (Majed Shamaa). He was subsequently arrested at his home by Turkish police in connection with his appearance in this sketch on October 30; the next day, October 31, he was interrogated by the Public Prosecution office on charges that the sketch incites “hatred and insults the Turkish people,” but the Public Prosecutor ordered his release because he considered the comedy sketch to fall within the parameters of Majed’s journalistic work, as he works within a well-known media institution, and the sketch falls within the framework of freedom of expression. Despite this order, Majed was not released, but was handed over to the police station to be deported from Turkey to Syria, according to the defense lawyer’s statement, in which he confirmed that his client had been transferred to the deportation center.
On November 3, the Orient Media Group published a letter handwritten by Majed, in which he indicated that he was in Gaziantep, and that he had been forced to sign some papers that included a statement giving his approval for his deportation to Syria.

Majed, who participated in the popular uprising against the Syrian regime since its early days in his home city of Ma’aret Harma in the suburbs of Idlib, is married with two sons, one of whom attends school in Istanbul, where Majed and his family live due to his work with the Orient Media Network which is based there. Over the years, he has published dozens of satirical videos making fun of the Syrian regime, Syrian Democratic Forces/ the Democratic Union Party, factions of the Armed Opposition, and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham, and accordingly, his presence in Syrian territory poses a serious threat to his life; many posts have already spread across social media pages expressing a desire to take revenge on the journalist Majed Shamaa.
In addition to all the above points, journalist Majed is considered a Syrian refugee, even if he has not been formally granted refugee status, since he meets the criteria to be classified as a refugee under the definition given in the 1951 Refugee Convention. The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry confirmed in its latest report issued in September 2021 that Syria, as a whole, is an unsafe country for the return of refugees, and that the principle of “non-refoulement” is a customary law binding on all countries, including countries that have not ratified the 1951 Convention.

We at the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) call on the Turkish authorities not to return any Syrian refugees, more especially media, political and human rights activists, because they will be targets of revenge for the perpetrators of violations in order to deter and intimidate anyone who dares to criticize them and expose their violations.

A screenshot of a Tweet from the personal Twitter account of a man named Jihad Barakat, who identifies himself as the leader of the Syrian regime forces' Ba'ath Commandos, in which he threatens the life of journalist Majed Shamaa if he returns. Posted on November 4, 2021

We have catalogued the publication of numerous social media posts by Syrian regime loyalists gloating over Majed Shamaa’s possible deportation to Syria in revenge for his opposition to the regime.