

Two Media Workers Killed, Three Injured, and Three Arrested or Kidnapped in Syria, Documented in November 2018

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 and Methodology

Parties to the conflict have persecuted journalists and citizen journalists to varying extents, committing crimes qualifying as war crimes against them. The Syrian regime, however, is the party which has perpetrated most of these crimes since March 2011, with the Syrian regime bearing responsibility for up to 83 percent of these criminal acts through waging 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 to which it is subjecting the Syrian people and to hide its crimes against Syrian citizens.

On the other hand, ISIS, as well as factions from the armed opposition and Self-Management forces, have also resorted to suppression of dissenting views as standard policy in areas under their control, as seen by the widespread arrests they have made.

In light of all of these facts, Syria has fallen to the 177th place (out of 180 countries) in the global rankings for press freedom, according to the Reporters Without Borders' [Press Freedom Index for 2018](#)

A journalist is defined as a civilian individual, according to international humanitarian law, regardless of their nationality. Any attack deliberately directed against a journalist is considered a war crime. However, when media workers get close to conflict zones, they are



deemed responsible for their own actions; in such cases, when they are targeted, they are viewed as collateral damage. Also, they lose their right to protection if they become directly involved in hostilities.

International humanitarian law states that journalists should be protected, with Article 79 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 stating 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 which might adversely affect 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 Syria in November 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 or she is not necessarily impartial as a journalist should be. In cases in which a citizen journalist has taken up arms and engaged directly in hostilities, he or she would be no longer deemed a citizen journalist, although it is possible that he or she would be referred to as a citizen journalist again, provided he or she refrains completely from any direct involvement in military action.

This report draws, firstly upon the daily, ongoing documentation and monitoring efforts by SNHR's team, and, secondly, on accounts from survivors, eyewitnesses, and local media workers who 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 which 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 proscriptions put in place by the re-



gime and other parties and the pursuit and persecution of media workers by Syrian regime forces and some of the other armed groups.

Please see the methodology adopted by SNHR for [documenting victims](#).

This report contains two accounts that we've collected through speaking directly with eyewitnesses, which 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 us offering or giving them any incentives. Also, SNHR tried to spare the eyewitnesses the agony of remembering the violations as much as possible, and gave assurances that we would 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 international humanitarian law. Whilst we include these to preserve the truth historically and store them as part of a national record, we don't necessarily describe these as having qualified as crimes.

II. November Outline

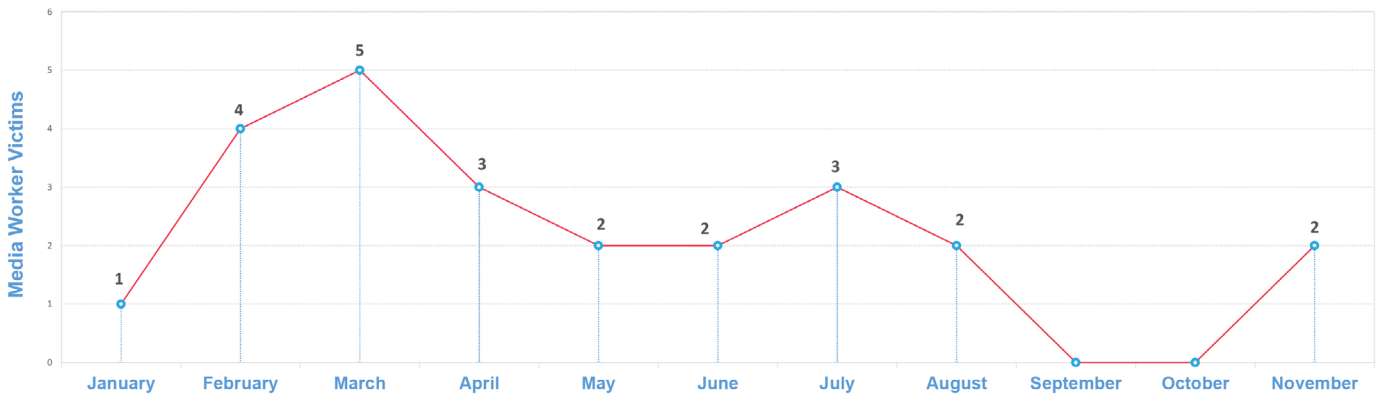
November saw continued harassment and persecution in the north by the dominant parties for the fifth consecutive month, accompanied by assassinations, bombings and kidnappings that contributed to creating a climate of terror, and destabilizing the security situation which the community in these areas desperately needs to maintain in order to secure many of its basic needs. Media workers have been among the groups worst affected by this situation, with most of the violations documented as having been committed against them in November taking place in northern Syria.

III. Executive Summary

A. Death toll among media activists since the start of 2018

SNHR has documented that 24 media workers were killed between the start of 2018 and December of the same year at the hands of the parties to the conflict in Syria. The death toll is distributed by month as follows:





December 1, 2018

As documented by SNHR

B. Violations against media workers in November 2018

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

- **Acts of killing:** SNHR has documented the killing of two media workers at the hands of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham.
- **Injuries:** We have recorded three media workers as being injured, as follows:
 - Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of armed opposition factions): one
 - Other parties: two
- **Arrest, kidnap and release:** We've recorded five 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): one case of arrest
 - Factions from the armed opposition: one case of arrest and release
 - Other parties: one case of kidnap and release



IV. Details

A. Extremist Islamic groups

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

- Acts of killing:

Raed Mahmoud Fares and Hamoud Jneed

On Friday, November 23, 2018, at around 12:00 Damascus time/10:00 GMT, as people were performing the Friday Prayer, Raed Fares was in his car with his fellow media activists Hamoud Jneed and Ali al Dandoush, driving from the URB towards Kafranbel's main market, on their way to the home of a relative of Raed. They were pursued by gunmen in another vehicle; when Raed stopped his car in front of his relative's house, the gunmen assassinated him and his colleague Hamoud. We believe that Hay'at Tahrir al Sham was most likely behind this assassination, and have issued [an extensive report](#) on this incident.

Raed, the director of "Radio Fresh", was a prominent activist in the popular uprising for democracy. He was born in Kafranbel city in southern Idlib governorate in 1972. Raed was married and a father of three children.

Hamoud was a media activist from Kafranbel city, who was a crew member of Radio Fresh. Born in 1980, he was a married father of four children, including a daughter with special needs. He had been actively involved in filming the demonstrations with Raed, as well as documenting the Syrian regime's bombardment of the city with many photos and videos. He also produced a number of reports for Radio Fresh.



Raed Fares



Hamoud Jneed



- Injuries:

Zakariya Kaser al Haj Mustafa

On Tuesday, November 30, 2018, Zakariya was targeted by gunfire, [with many bullets](#) entering his [left leg](#) and arm. He was targeted by members of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham while he was covering clashes between Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and the National Liberation Front, a faction of the armed opposition, in Kafr Hamra village in the western suburbs of Aleppo governo-rate, which is under the joint control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and factions of the armed opposition.

[Zakariya](#), known as Abi al Karam al Halabi, was born in Kafr Hamra village in 1998. He is the manager of the media office of Kafr Hamra village, and is a third year Law student. Zakaria is married and a father of a son.



Zakariya Kaser al Haj Mustafa

- Arrest:

Durgham Hammadi

On Wednesday, November 28, 2018, Durgham was arrested by gunmen affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at a check-point while he was heading from al Atareb city to Bab al Hawa area to obtain an authorization to film in a camp near the borders. His fate remains unknown to the SNHR.



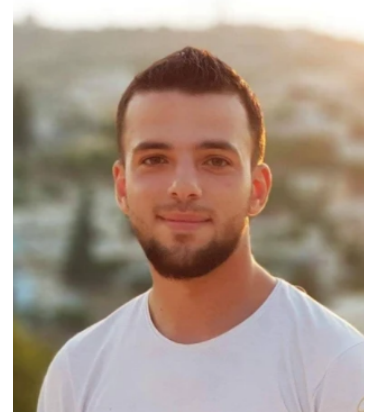
Durgham Hammadi

B. Factions from the armed opposition

- Arrest and release:

Bilal Sraiwel

On Thursday, November 8, 2018, at around 20.00, gunmen affiliated to al Sultan Murad brigade, one of the factions from the armed opposition, arrested Bilal in Vilas street in the center of Afrin city on charges of filming without obtaining prior authorization. He was taken to an undisclosed location, before he was released on Sunday, November 11, 2018, after being subjected to [severe torture](#).



Bilal Sraiwel



Bilal, from Douma city in the Eastern Ghouta in eastern Damascus Suburbs governorate, was born in 1993. He is a media worker for Swa'adna Alsouria Organization, a member of the Media Workers Association of East Ghouta, and a designer for the Syrian Independent Kurd League.

SNHR contacted Bilal¹, who told us, **“As I was photographing in a street in the city of Afrin, someone approached me and asked me what I was doing. I told him that I was taking some humanitarian pictures. He confiscated my equipment and contacted a patrol of the security office who tied my hands and blindfolded me and took me to some place half an hour away from Afrin, where they beat me and tortured me without asking any questions.**

After half an hour of torture, they asked me whom I work for, but they did not believe me and continued beating me brutally all over my body, and they hung me up from the ceiling and ground out cigarette butts on my body to force me to confess that I was working for a certain party, then they put me in solitary for four days tied with handcuffs and blindfolds never knowing where I was or what was happening around me.”

Bilal added, **“ On Sunday, November 11, they asked me to put on my clothes and took me to a nearby area of Afrin, and they took me to an office where there was someone sitting. I was told that that man was Abu Ahmad, the commander of the Sultan Murad Brigade, then I was released”**, Bilal confirmed that the individuals who arrested and tortured him were affiliated to someone known as Abu al Laith who is affiliated with the Sultan Murad Brigade.

C- Other parties

- Injuries:

Ibrahim Ahmad Marto and Klistan Mohammad Ali

On Friday, November, 2018, [Ibrahim](#) and [Klistan](#) were working on a report in al Munbateh village, which is [administratively](#) a part of [Tal Abyad](#) city in the northern suburbs of Raqqa governorate near the Syrian-Turkish borders, which is under the control of Self-Management forces (consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party – a branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party or PKK). Ibrahim was shot at his left arm with one bullet, while Klistan was shot with a bullet in the face. According to information we received from activists and witnesses in the area, we believe that Turkish forces were responsible for the shooting.



Ibrahim Marto

Hawar News agency released [a statement](#) condemning what its reporters were exposed to.

¹ We contacted him via WhatsApp on November 21, 2018

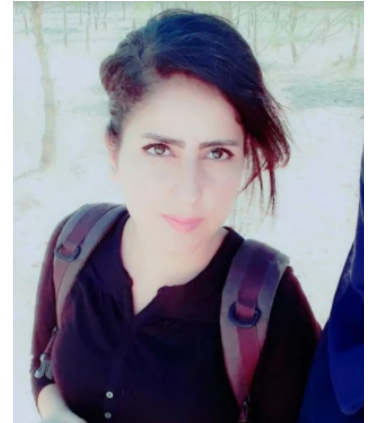


Ibrahim, from Tal Abyad city, was born in 1995, and has a certificate of preparatory education. He is single and works as a reporter for the Hawar News agency.

[Klistan](#), from Tal Abyad city, was born in 1998, and has a secondary school certificate. She is single and works as a reporter for the Hawar News agency.

SNHR contacted Ibrahim², who told us that he went with his colleague Klistan to al Munbateh village to report on the artillery shelling by Turkish forces that had targeted the village the previous day, “ **During our work, we were targeted by the Turkish border guards by their sniper; which resulted in a wound to my left hand. Immediately, I was taken to the national hospital in Tal Abyad, where I underwent surgery to extract the bullet, then I left the hospital two hours later.**”

Klistan also suffered a critical neck injury, Ibrahim added.



Klistan Mohammad Ali

Kidnap and release:

- Farid Dalli Omar

On Thursday, November 15, 2018, on the basis of the earlier arrest of a fellow media activist, Bilal Sraiwel, by the Sultan Murad Brigade, Farid was kidnapped by unknown gunmen on the road linking Izaz city with Afrin in the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, an area under the control of factions of the armed opposition.

[Farid](#), a media activist, known as Farid Abu Yamen, was born in 1994. He has a secondary school certificate, and works for the Sultan Murad Brigade, which is affiliated with factions of the armed opposition.



Farid Dalli Omar

V. Recommendations

Security Council

Work on combating the current policy of impunity by referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

OHCHR

Condemn the targeting of media workers in Syria and shed light on their sacrifice and suffering.

² We contacted him via WhatsApp on November 24, 2018



Commission of Inquiry (COI)

Launch investigations into 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 previous reports. SNHR is willing to cooperate and to provide more evidence 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 commemorate their sacrifice. Also, these institutions should contact the bereaved families of murdered media workers to offer consolation and any assistance which they can provide.

Finally, all parties must respect international humanitarian law in areas under their control with respect to the protection of civilians, 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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