

One Media Activist Killed, Seven Injured, and Two Arrested, Toll of November 2017

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Saturday, December 2, 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.”



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.

In November, SNHR recorded an unprecedented drop in the overall toll of violations against media activists since last June. We documented one incident of killing by Syrian regime forces.

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 nine 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](#).

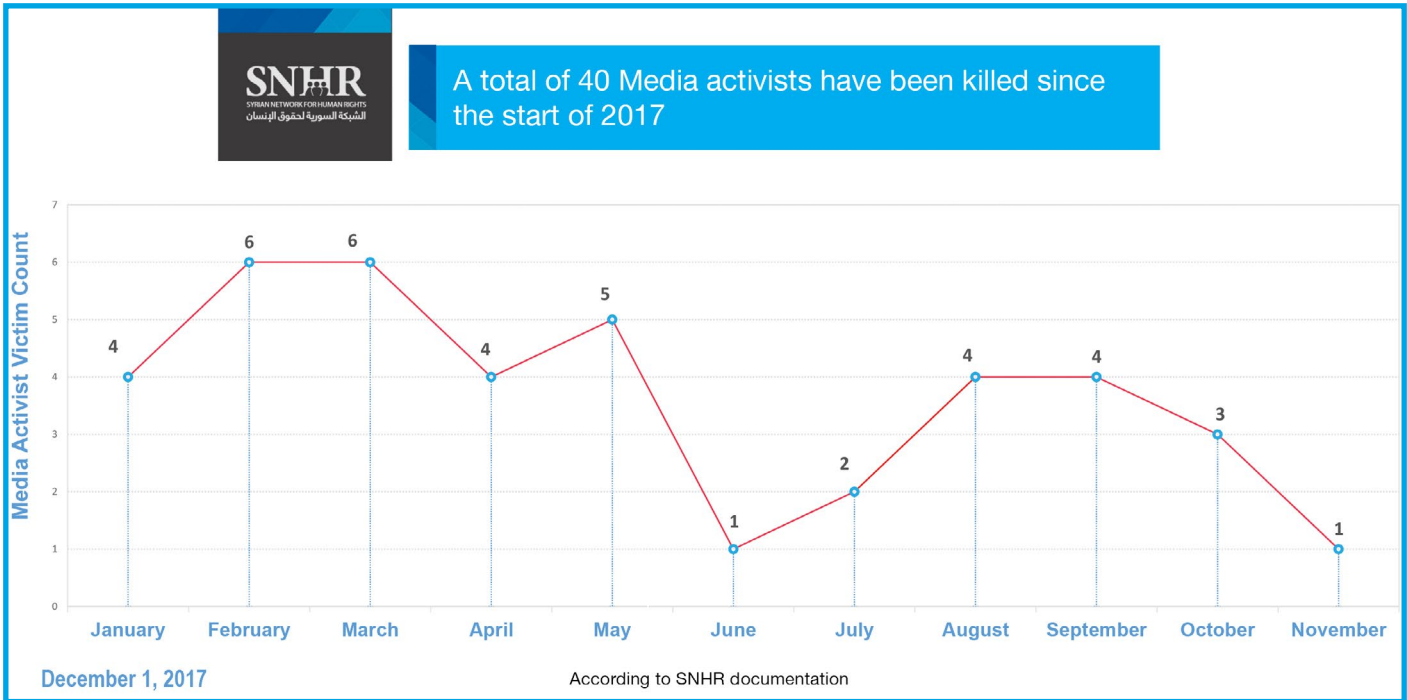
In light of the security and logistic difficulties to access all the areas where violations take place, it is worth noting that these statistics and incidents are only the bare minimum of the actual magnitude of crimes and violations that happened.



II. Executive Summary

A. Most notable violations against media activists in 2017

SNHR has recorded the killing of 40 media activists between the start of 2017 and December of the same year.



B. most notable violations against media activists in November 2017

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

- **Acts of killing:** SNHR documented the killing of one media activist at the hands of Syrian regime forces.
- **Injuries:** we recorded that seven media activists were injured, distributed as follows:
 - Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): 6
 - Russian forces: 1
- **Arrest and release:** we recorded six cases, as follows:
 - Armed opposition factions: we recorded one cases of arrest, where the arrested media activist was released later.
 - Self-Management forces (primarily consisting of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers’ Party): we recorded two release cases and one case of arrest, where the arrested media activist was released later.



III. Details

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

- Acts of killing

Mohammad Khaled al Kanj

Wednesday, November 8, 2017, Mohammad was killed by shrapnel to the head and flank after a shell fired by Syrian regime forces artillery landed near him as he was covering the clashes between Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and armed opposition factions, on one side, and Syrian regime forces, on the other side, on the battlefield of Tal Bleil in eastern suburbs of Hama governorate.

Mohammad, a reporter and photographer for Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's Iba' Agency, from Khan Sheikhoun city, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in 1997, a second-year university student who was studying civil engineering, unmarried.



Mohammad al Kanj

We contacted Anas al Dyab¹ who told us that his friend Mohammad was hit by a shell in the head and the flank from behind, after it was fired by Syrian regime artillery as he was covering the rebels' advancement on Tal Bleil battlefield: **“The injury was fatal, as he died immediately.”**

- Injuries

Ali Hatem al Sheikh

Tuesday, November 7, 2017, Ali was injured by a shrapnel in the back after a shell fired by Syrian regime forces artillery landed near him, as he was covering a previous shelling on Saqba city, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate.

Ali, known as Ali Bakr, [a photographer for Ghouta Media Center](#), from Hazza town, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, born in 1989, has a degree from the faculty of economics at Damascus University, married and a father of one.



Ali al Sheikh

¹ Via Facebook on November 17, 2017



Ali ² told us that the city was heavily shelled by the Syrian regime artillery: on that day **“The shells landed in al Jam’iya Square. I rushed there to document the aftermath of the shelling and the resultant destruction and deaths. One of the shells landed behind me, and the shrapnel hit me in my back, I had to be hospitalized at Saqba Medical Center, and then Dar al Shefa Hospital in Hamouriya city, where I received treatment.”**

Mohammad Khaled al Hakim

Thursday, November 16, 2017, Mohammad suffocated due to inhaling poison gases in an attack by Syrian regime forces as he was covering the clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions on the battlefield of Idarat al Markabat in Harasta city, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate.

Mohammad, a photographer for Orient TV Channel, from Irbeen city, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, born in 1988, has an elementary education certificate, married.

Mohammad ³ told us that he was with Yaman al Sayed, Orient's reporter, as they were covering the clashes between armed opposition factions and Syrian regime forces, when the latter targeted them suddenly by throwing bombs containing poison gases that landed near them: **“I felt suffocated from the smell. Soon after, I started coughing and my eyes turned red and were burning. The rebels rushed me to a nearby medical point, where they wiped my face with sterilized tissues, and put an oxygen mask over my face.”**

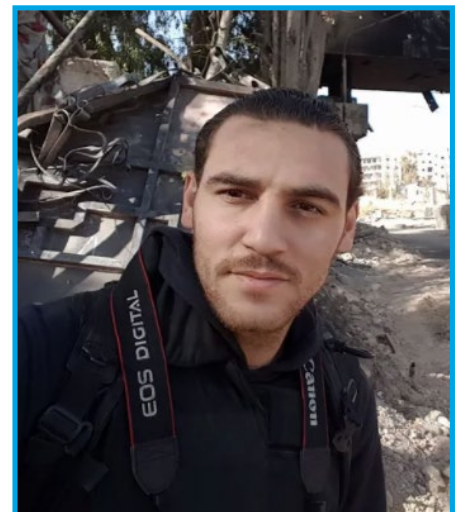


Mohammad al Hakim

Yaman Khaled al Sayyed

Thursday, November 16, 2017, Yaman suffocated due to inhaling poison gases in an attack by Syrian regime forces as he was covering the clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions on the battlefield of Idarat al Markabat in Harasta city, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate.

Yaman, [a reporter for Orient TV Channel](#), from Irbeen city, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, born in 1992, a second-year university student who is studying economics, married.



Yaman al Sayyed

² Via Facebook on November 17, 2017

³ Via Facebook on November 17, 2017



Yaman⁴ told us that he was 15 meters away from Syrian regime forces at Idarat al Markabat battlefield when they threw a bomb loaded with a poison gas at him and his friend: **“The nasty smell affected my lungs, and I had difficulties breathing, and my eyes turned red and they were burning. Mohammad and I and other 14 rebels showed the same symptoms. We were taken to a nearby medical point.”**

Mazen Mohammad al Atrash

Thursday, November 16, 2017, Mazen suffocated due to inhaling poison gases an attack by Syrian regime forces as he was covering the clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions on the battlefield of Idarat al Markabat in Harasta city, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate.

Mazen, a reporter and photographer for Qasyoun News Agency, from Homs governorate, born in 1974, has a high school diploma, married and a father of four.

We contacted Mazen⁵ who told us that he was with the media activists Abdul Mun'im Eisa, Diyaa al Shami, and Mohammad al Jaza'eri on Idarat al Markabat battlefield to cover the clashes between Ahrar al Sham Movement and Syrian regime forces, when they were targeted by Syrian regime forces with poison gases: **“A nasty smell spread, and I had difficulties breathing and my eyes turned red and they were burning, and I suffered from a headache. I was rushed with the injured to a nearby medical point.”**



Mazen al Atrash

Diyaa al Shami “his actual name was concealed for security concerns”

Thursday, November 16, 2017, Diyaa suffocated due to inhaling poison gases an attack by Syrian regime forces as he was covering the clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions on the battlefield of Idarat al Markabat in Harasta city, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate.

Diyaa, [a reporter and photographer](#) for Step News Agency, from al Nashabiya town, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, born in 1995, a first-year university student who is studying political science, unmarried.



Diyaa al Shami

⁴ Via Facebook on November 17, 2017

⁵ Via Facebook on November 17, 2017



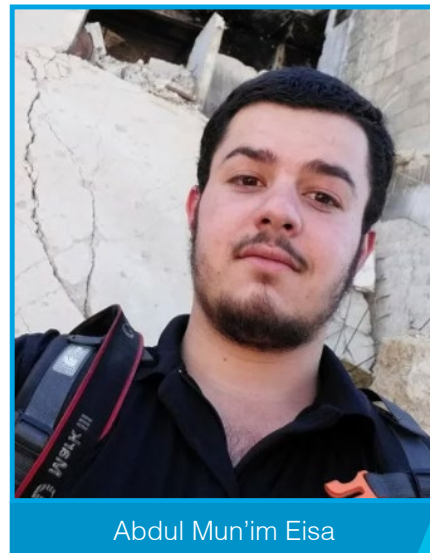
Diyaa⁶ told SNHR: **“As I was working with a group of media activists, covering clashes between the rebels and the Syrian regime on Idarat al Markabat battlefield, we were targeted by Syrian regime forces using munitions. One of them carried chlorine gas. I couldn’t determine its type due to the heavy shelling. I had difficulties breathing, blurry vision, teary eyes, and I think I lost consciousness for a brief period of time.”**

Abdul Mun’im Abdul Fattah Eisa

Thursday, November 16, 2017, Abdul Mun’im suffocated due to inhaling poison gases an attack by Syrian regime forces as he was covering the clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions on the battlefield of Idarat al Markabat in Harasta city, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate.

Abdul Mun’im, an independent photographer and head of Ghouta Media Center, from Hamouriya city, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, born in 1994, has an intermediate education certificate, unmarried.

We contacted Abdul Mun’im⁷ who confirmed that around 07:30, as he was with other four media activists on Idarat al Markabat battlefield, hand grenades and shells landed near them. One of the bombs was loaded with poison gases: **“A nasty smell spread, and I suffocated. I was rushed to a nearby medical point.”**



Abdul Mun’im Eisa

B. Violations by Russian forces

- Injuries

Abdul Majid Hussein al Halabi

Monday, November 13, 2017, Abdul Majid sustained bruises all over [his body](#) and scratches [in the head](#), back, and feet in a bombing by fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian that fired a missile at a building. Abdul Majid was injured as he was covering a massacre that was perpetrated by the same warplanes in al Atareb city market, western suburbs of Aleppo governorate. The city is under the control of armed opposition factions.

Abdul Majid, an independent photographer, from Aleppo city, born in 1986, he has a degree in media, married and a father.



Abdul Majid al Halabi

⁶ Via Facebook on November 17, 2017

⁷ Via Facebook on November 17, 2017



When we contacted Abdul Majid⁸, he told us that Russian warplanes bombed the city market, resulting in a big massacre: **“I got up a building that was near the bombed site to film the massacre. The warplanes, however, came back and bombed the building I was at. I fell from the second floor and sustained bruises all over my body, and scratches in my head, back, and feet. I was immediately rushed to Bab al Hawa Hospital on the Syrian-Turkish borders, where I received treatment.”** Abdul Majid added that the bombing on that day resulted in the killing of tens of civilians, while more than 100 civilians were injured. Also, the market and al Atareb Free Police Station were completely destroyed.

C. Violations by armed opposition factions

- Arrest and release

Hasan Abdul Aziz al Mheimeed

Wednesday, November 1, 2017, Hasan was abducted by armed men from Nour al Din Zinki Movement in Qebtan al Jabal town, western suburbs of Aleppo governorate. He was taken to an undisclosed location. He was released on Saturday, November 25, 2017.

Hasan, a media activist for the Free Education Administration in Aleppo governorate, from Aleppo city, 24-year-old.



Hasan al Mheimeed

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

- Arrest and release

Abu Taym al Halabi “he didn’t reveal his real name for security concerns”

Monday, October 2, 2017, he was arrested by Self-Management forces at a checkpoint on the road between western suburbs of Aleppo governorate and northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. They took him to one of their detention centers in Ifreen city, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. He was released on Thursday, November 2, 2017.

Abu Taym a reporter for Smart News Agency, from Aleppo city, born in 1994



Abu Taym al Halabi

⁸ Via Facebook on November 17, 2017

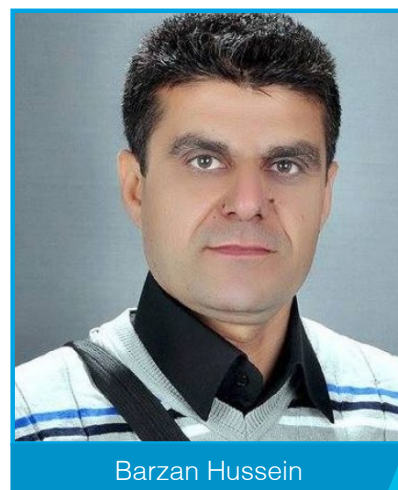


Abu Taym⁹ told us that his arrest was over a libeled report, where members of al Ghzewiya checkpoint stopped him as he was heading for Idlib city from Ifreen city. They arrested him after checking his name and inspecting his mobile phone, where they found pictures of him carrying a weapon and a carrying a camera in other pictures, in addition to pictures of destroyed houses: **“A patrol came and took me to detention center in Ifreen, and they left me five me in solitary confinement, and then two days in a mass cell. Afterwards, they took me to the interrogation room and asked me about pictures they found on my phone, where I am shown carrying a weapon. I told them that these are old pictures, and that I am working now with a charity. Three days later, I was transferred to Rojo Prison (known as al Sejn al Aswad “The Black Prison”) where I spent five days in solitary confinement during which I was interrogated. Then, I was transferred to a room that house 30 detainees. At the point, I had been detained for a month, but they never beat or insulted me. They gave me my equipment back and transferred me to the checkpoint, where they told me that I am banished from the area, before releasing me. ”**

Barzan Hussein

Friday, November 10, 2017, Self-Management forces released Barzan from one of their detention centers in al Qamashli, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. Barzan was arrested by Self-Management forces on Saturday, May 13, 2017.

Barzan, a reporter for the TV program Ark which is aired on Zagrus TV Channel. from Ma'bada town, eastern suburbs of Hasaka governorate.



Barzan Hussein

Hajji al Meswat

Sunday, November 12, 2017, Self-Management forces released Hajji, after he was arrested on Monday, July 31, 2017.

Hajji, head of the Journalist Committee in al Hasaka governorate and head of the office of the official Furat Newspaper, from Tal Tishreen village, Derbasiya city suburbs, northern Hasaka governorate.



Hajji al Meswat

⁹ Via WhatsApp on November 3, 2017



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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