

Six Media Activists Killed, 10 Injured, and Three Arrested, Toll of February 2017

The Syrian Regime is Killing Media Activists at Higher Rates than before Ankara Ceasefire Agreement

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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The Syrian Network for Human Rights, founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, non-profit independent organization that is a primary source for the United Nations on all death toll-related statistics 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 in Syria under a Rus-



sian-Turkish sponsorship. The parties signing to the statement - the Syrian regime, on one hand, and armed opposition factions, on the other hand, pledged to cease all combat operations including aerial airstrikes, and cease all raids and advancements on the ground. However, military ISIS-held areas (Self-proclaimed the Islamic State) were excluded from the agreement. Since the Ankara Ceasefire Agreement went into effect, there has been a decent and notable drop in the rates of killing throughout Syria in comparison with the previous months from March 2011 until now. The main focus here is the areas under the control of armed opposition factions, as the Syrian regime-held areas aren't subjected to heavy, daily aerial bombardment, which has resulted in the killing of no less than 60% of the victims, and destroyed buildings, displacing the people of Syria.

Nonetheless, breaches didn't stop, mainly by the Syrian regime, who is seemingly the party that would be affected the most should the ceasefire go on, especially crimes of extrajudicial killing, and, more horrendously, dying due to torture, which strongly proves that there is some sort of ceasefire on the table. The crimes, however, that the international community wasn't able to notice, and particularly the Turkish and Russian sponsors, are still ongoing as nothing has changed in that regard.

SNHR hasn't noticed a decrease in rates of media activists' killings by the Syrian regime forces after Ankara Ceasefire Agreement that it exceeded in February what was recorded in the months prior to the Agreement.

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.

II. Methodology

According to SNHR's methodology, a civilian 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 civilian 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 civilian 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.

This report draws upon SNHR's archive and the investigations conducted by the Network in addition to accounts by victims' families, information from local activists, and analyzing the pictures and videos that we have been receiving and archiving in our records since 2011.

to read more about SNHR methodology in documenting victims: http://sn4hr.org/public_html/wp-content/pdf/english/SNHR_Methodology_en.pdf

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.

III. Executive Summary

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

A. Acts of killing: SNHR documented the killing of six media activists as follows:

- Syrian regime forces: five media activists
- ISIS: one media activist

B. Injuries: we recorded 10 injuries as follows:

- Syrian regime forces: nine injuries
- Other parties: one injury

C. Arrest and release: we recorded six cases as follows:

- Fateh Al Sham Front: we recorded two cases of arrest, where one of the two detained media activists was released later.
- Armed opposition factions: we recorded one release



- Self-management forces (Primarily consisting of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers’ Party): we recorded one case of arrest, where the detained media activist was released later.

D. Other violations: we recorded that a media office was bombed by fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes.

IV. Details

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

Acts of killing

Friday, February 3, 2017, media activist [Majed Bashir al Turk](#) died of head wounds caused by shrapnel from a shell fired by Syrian regime artillery as he was tending to the wounded who fell in a Syrian regime’s artillery shelling on Douma city in eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. Douma city is under the control of armed opposition factions.

[Majed](#), a photographer for Syria Mubasher Network, from Douma city in Damascus suburbs, works as a paramedic with Sham Humanitarian Network, born in 1985, has a high school diploma, married and a father of two.



SNHR spoke to the media activist Baraa Abdurrahman, a friend of Majed's, via Facebook, and he gave us his account of what happened:

“Douma city was subjected to a heavy artillery shelling on that day. Majed went along with the paramedics teams to tend to the wounded. As usual, Majed brought his camera. Before we got to the site, a shell fell next to the ambulance which he was driving. Some shrapnel went into his head which caused his death.”

Sunday, February 12, 2017, media activist [Basel Nayef al Droubi](#) died of abdomen wounds caused by shrapnel from a tank shell fired by Syrian regime forces tanks which fell near him as he was covering the clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions in the battle of “Al Maut Wala al Mathalla” on the battlefield of al Manshiya neighborhood in southern Daraa city.



[Basel](#), a [reporter](#) for the Syrian Media Commission, and head of the media office of Qouat Shabab al Sunna, an armed opposition faction, from Bosra al Sham city in the suburbs of Daraa governorate, born in 1994, has an intermediate education certificate, married and a father of one child.



SNHR spoke to the media activist Meqdad al Meqdad, a friend of Basel's, via Facebook, who gave us his account of what happened:

“As Basel was covering the clashes between regime forces and the factions in al Manshiya neighborhood in Daraa al Balad, the area was shelled by tanks. A shrapnel hit Basel in the abdomen which caused his death.”

Monday, February 13, 2017, media activist [Abdullah Mohammad Nour al Din al Alyan al Hariri](#) died of wounds caused by shrapnel in most of his body after a mortar shell fired by Syrian regime forces fell near him as he was covering the clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions in the battle of “Al Maut Wala al Mathalla” on the battlefield of al Manshiya neighborhood in southern Daraa city.

[Abdullah](#), a photographer for Ferqat Amoud Houran, an armed opposition faction, from Bosra al Harir town in the suburbs of Daraa, born in 1996, has an intermediate education certificate, married.

Monday, February 13, 2017, media activist [Omar Ahmad Abu Nabbout](#) died of injuries sustained after [he](#) was shot by a Syrian regime sniper in his liver as he was covering clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions in the battle of “Al Maut Wala al Mathalla” on the battlefield of al Manshiya neighborhood in southern Daraa city.

[Omar](#), known as Abu Taym al Hourani, a [reporter](#) for Tajamou' Ahrar Houran media institution, from Daraa al Balad area in Daraa city, born in 1995, has a high school diploma, single.



SNHR spoke to Abu Mahmoud al Hourani, a friend of Omar's, via Facebook, and he gave us his account of what happened:

“On Monday, February 13, Omar was injured by a Syrian regime sniper's bullet while he was covering the clashes between the factions and the regime on the battlefield of al Manshiya neighborhood in Daraa al Balad. The bullet, which pierced through his liver, caused his death.”

Wednesday, February 22, 2017 media activist [Mohammad Baraa Ryad Hallaq](#) died of wounds caused by shrapnel in most of his body after a missile fired by fixed-wing Syrian regime warplanes fell near him as he was covering the clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions on one of the battlefront in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate.

[Mohammad Baraa](#), known as Abu al Yazid Taftanaz, a [reporter](#) for al Jesr TV channel, and the former director of warfare media for Ahrar al Sham Movement, from Taftanaz city in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in 1987, a fourth-year university student at the faculty of information engineering in University of Aleppo, married.



Injuries

Monday, January 23, 2017, media activist Abu Mohammad al Bardawi, he concealed his name for security concerns, was injured in his right foot after a Syrian regime sniper shot him in Ain al Fija village in Wadi Barada area in northwestern Damascus suburbs governorate.

Abu Mohammad, head of the Media Commission in Wadi Barada, from Ain al Fija village in Wadi Barada in Damascus suburbs governorate, born on June 21, 1988, has a high school diploma, single.

On Tuesday, February 28, 2017, SNHR spoke to Abu Mohammad al Bardawi, via Facebook, who gave us his testimony:

“Around 10:00 PM of Monday, January 23, as I was roaming in the village to see the toll of the military operations, I was shot with an explosive bullet in my right knee. The bullet was shot by a sniper from Al Lewa 104, which is affiliated to al Haras al Jomhuri (The Republican Guard). I wasn't able to get a proper treat-



ment in light of the siege that was imposed on Wadi Barada at that time. After we were evacuated to Idlib, the doctors told me that my knee bone was shattered and I had to remove the bone due to the inability to treat it, in addition to a fracture in my thigh bones. I am still receiving treatment to this day.”

Sunday, February 12, 2017, media activist [Tahrir Nedal al Qaddah](#) was injured in his left hand and back by shrapnel after a “Pheel” rocket, which was fired by Syrian regime forces artillery, fell near him as he was covering the clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions in the battle of “Al Maut Wala al Mathalla” on the battlefield of al Manshiya neighborhood in southern Daraa city.

[Tahrir](#), a photographer for Ferqat al Hasem Shuhadaa al Hurriya, an armed opposition faction, from al Hrak city in the suburbs of Daraa governorate, born in 1990, a third-year university student studying accounting at the faculty of economics. Married and a father of one boy and one girl.

SNHR spoke to the media activist [Tahrir al Qaddah](#), via Facebook, and he gave us his testimony:

“I was covering the battle of “Al Mawt Wala al Mathalla”, which the rebels launched against the Syrian regime forces, in al Manshiya neighborhood in Daraa city. I was injured in my left hand and my back with shrapnel from a “Pheel” rocket that fell near me after the regime forces fired it.”

Friday, February 17, 2017, media activist [Mohammad Abd al Hamid al Srahein](#) was [injured](#) by shrapnel in his right hand, which he had to amputate, after fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (Investigations are still ongoing to determine the perpetrator party accurately) fired a missile near him, as he was working on a report on the civilians’ situation in al Arba’ein neighborhood in Daraa al Balad in Daraa city. The neighborhood is under the control of Syrian regime forces.

[Mohammad](#), known as Mohammad Nour, a reporter for Al Jazeera TV channel, from al Ghariya al Sharqiya town in the suburbs of Daraa governorate, born in 1992, has a degree in Sharia, married and a father of two.

SNHR spoke to the media activist Omar al Hourani, a friend of Mohammad’s, via Facebook, and he gave us his account of what happened:

“While Mohammad was working on a report capturing the civilians’ situation in al Arba’ein neighborhood, warplanes bombed the area and Mohammad sustained a severe wound in his right hand in the airstrike. Mohammad was taken to a medical point where his hand was amputated. He is now in Jordan continuing his treatment.”



Wednesday, February 22, 2017, media activist [Mohammad Shehada al Ali](#) was wounded in his right hand and sustained bruises in most of his body after fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles near him at his workplace in the Syrian Journalistic Center in Ma'aret Harma village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The village is under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Fateh al Sham Front. [Mohammad](#), head of the Syrian Journalistic Center office in Hama governorate, from Abdin village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in 1983, a graduate from the Teacher Institute – The department of music, married and a father of three children.



SNHR spoke to Mohammad al Ali, via Facebook, who gave us his testimony:

“warplanes fired four missiles around the Syrian Journalistic Center in Ma'aret Harma. As I was in the office with my colleague Mohammad Ali Haj Ahmad, two missiles fell 100 meters to the north of the office, and the two others fell 15 meters to the south of the office. As a result, I was wounded in my right hand, and I got five stitches, and I sustained bruises all over my body. Mohammad sustained bruises as well, and the office was ruined.”

Wednesday, February 22, 2017, media activist Mohammad Ali Haj Ahmad sustained bruises in most of his body after fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles near him at his workplace in the Syrian Journalistic Center in Ma'aret Harma village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The village is under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Fateh al Sham Front.

[Mohammad](#), works at the visual department – design and production at the Syrian Journalistic Center office in Hama governorate, from Ma'aret Harma village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in 1995, has an intermediate education certificate, single.



Wednesday, February 22, 2017, media activist [Saif Ahmad al Abdullah](#) was injured in his upper left thigh by shrapnel after fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (Investigations are still ongoing to determine the perpetrator party accurately) fired a missile near him as he was covering the clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions on the battlefield of al Jabriya village in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate.

[Saif](#), a reporter for Orient News TV channel, from Sahl al Ghab area in the suburbs of Hama governorate, born in 1986, has a degree from the faculty of science – the mathematics department, married and a father of two girls.

SNHR spoke to the media activist Saif al Abdullah, via Facebook, who gave us his testimony:

“As I was covering one of the military operations for armed opposition factions against the regime forces on the battlefield of Bredij, the area was bombed by warplanes, a missile shrapnel went into my left hip joint area. The civil defense rushed me immediately to Ma’aret al Nu’man hospital.”

Wednesday, February 22, 2017, media activist [Taym Mohammad al Yousef](#) was injured by shrapnel in his right hand and neck, and sustained burns in his face after fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (Investigations are still ongoing to determine the perpetrator party accurately) fired a missile near him as he was covering the clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions on the battlefield of al Jabiriya village in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate.

[Taym](#), a reporter for al Jesr TV channel, from Sahl al Ghab area in the suburbs of Hama governorate, born in 1988, has a degree from the faculty of literature and humanitarian science – the history department, married and a father of one daughter.

SNHR spoke to the media activist Taym al Yousef, via Facebook, and he gave us his testimony:

“On Wednesday, February 22, warplanes targeted a gathering for media activists -I was among them- who were covering the clashes between the rebels and the regime forces on the battlefield of al Jabiriya village. A missile fell near us, which caused me wounds in my right hand and neck, and burns in my face. I was rushed to Ma’aret al Nu’man hospital in Idlib where I underwent a surgery.”



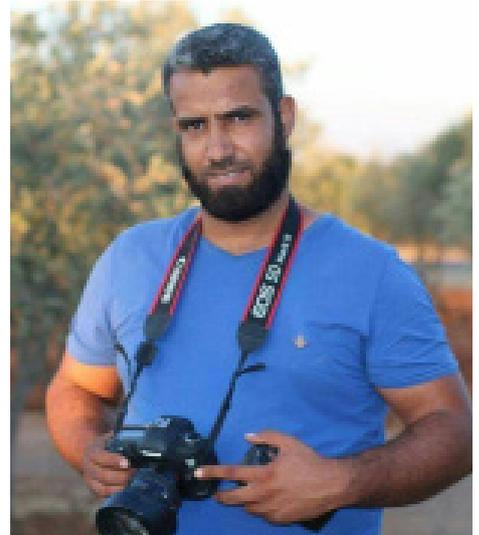
Wednesday, February 22, 2017, media activist [Mohammad Amin Hussein](#) Hawweesh was injured by shrapnel in his foot and abdomen after fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (Investigations are still ongoing to determine the perpetrator party accurately) fired a missile near him as he was covering the clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions on the battlefield of al Jabiriya village in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate.

[Mohammad Amin](#), a reporter for Smart News agency, from Bredij village in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate, born in 1985, has a high school degree, married and a father of three boys.

SNHR spoke to the media activist [Mohammad Amin](#), via Facebook, who gave us his testimony:

“As I was covering the clashes on the battlefield of al Jabiriya in Hama governorate, a warplanes carried out an airstrike in the area, and I was injured along with the media activists Saif al Abdullah and Taym al Yousef by the shrapnel from the bombardment. I was rushed to Ma’aret al Nu’man hospital, where the doctors removed the shrapnel from my abdomen, put a cast on my right foot, and amputated my left foot’s instep. I am still suffering from the injury, as the state of my left foot forced the doctors to postpone sewing the amputated part of my foot. I am still receiving treatment for my foot.”

Friday, February 24, 2017, media activist [Basam Mohammad al Khannous](#) was [injured](#) in his back, right hand, and the hip area by shrapnel after fixed-wing Syrian regime/Russian forces warplanes (Investigations are still ongoing to determine the perpetrator party accurately) fired a missile near [him](#) as he was covering the missile bombardment by fixed-wing warplanes on Tishreen neighborhood in northeastern Damascus city. The neighborhood is under the control of armed opposition factions.



[Bassam](#), known as Sattar al Dimashqi, a fourth-year university student at the faculty of economics in al Baath University, married.

SNHR spoke to the media activist Bassam al Khannous, via Facebook, who gave us his testimony:

“As I was recording the aftermath of an airstrike carried out by warplanes on the neighborhood at night, the warplanes carried out a second airstrike and the missile fell near me. The missile shrapnel injured me in the back area and my right hand, and my camera was broken.”

Other violations

Wednesday, February 22, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime warplanes fired a number of [missiles](#) near [the Syrian Journalistic Center](#) in Ma'aret Harma village in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. [The office equipment](#) and furniture were moderately [damaged](#). The village is under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Fateh al Sham Front.

B. Violations by extremist Islamic groups

ISIS

Acts of killing

Thursday, February 23, 2017, civil defense announced that they had found the dead body of the media activist Basel Ahmad Darwish, which was shot, in a mass grave in al Khazanat area -a former government facility where fuel was stored- near Khan Shaikhoun city in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The dead body was found the day before. It should be noted that Lewa al Aqsa (Formerly Jund al Aqsa), an affiliate of ISIS, arrested Basel on Wednesday, February 8, 2017, after they raided points for Jaish al Nasr, an armed opposition faction, near Taybat al Imam city in the northern suburbs of Hama governorate.

[Basel](#), a photographer for the media office of Jaish al Nasr, from al Zakat village in the suburbs of Hama governorate, born in 1990, married and a father of two boys.



Fateh al Sham Front (Formerly al Nusra Front)

Arrest and release

Saturday, February 18, 2017, Fateh al Sham Front arrested the media activist [Ahmad Khannous](#) as he was with a team from the Free Archeology Directorate in Idlib governorate in a mission in Qalb Louza village in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. He was transferred to “Harem city” prison in the northern suburbs of Idlib governorate. Ahmad was released by the Front on February 20, 2017, after they verified the nature of the mission the team was on.

Ahmad Khannous, head of the media office at the Free Archeology Directorate in Idlib governorate, from Ma’aret Harma village in the suburbs of Idlib governorate.

Thursday, February 23, 2017, Fateh al Sham Front arrested the media activist [Mohammad Sbih](#) from his place of residence in Kafr Sajna town in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate after confiscating his media equipment. The location to which Ahmad was taken is still unknown to SNHR as well as his family.

Mohammad a reporter for Madar al Yaum news website, from Kafr Sajna town in the southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in 1982.

C. Violations by armed opposition factions

Release

Tuesday, February 7, 2017, al Jabha al Shamiya released the media activist [Amer al Hasan](#) after the Free Journalists’ Union submitted an appeal for his release on Thursday, February 2, 2017. It should be noted that al Jabha al Shamiya arrested Amer on Friday, January 13, 2017, at one of their checkpoints.

Amer, a reporter for al Harka al Sha’biya al Swuriya, from al Sfeira city in the suburbs of Aleppo governorate, has a high school diploma, born in 1989, married and a father.



The appeal for reconsideration that was sent by the Free Journalists’ Union



D. Violations by the Self-management forces (Consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party)

Arrest and release

Saturday, February 4, 2017, Self-management forces arrested the media activist [Jalnak Abdullah Kan'ou](#) at one of their checkpoints on the outskirts of al Jawadaiya town. He was taken to “Amouda city” prison in the suburbs of al Hasaka governorate. He was released from the same prison on Sunday, February 5, 2017

Jalnak, a reporter for Kurdstreet News Network, from Jel Agha town in the suburbs of al Hasaka governorate, a university student, 24-year-old.

E. Other parties

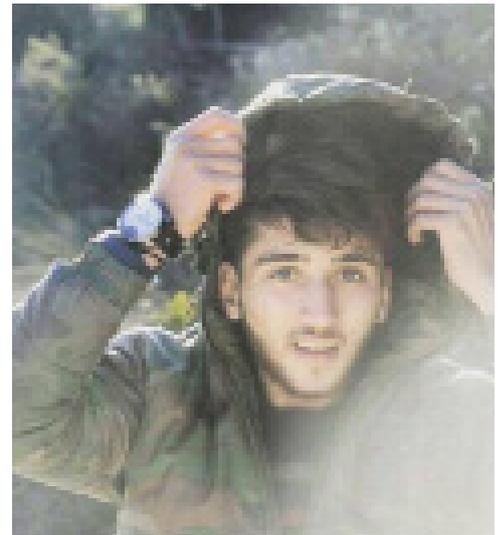
Injuries

Thursday, February 9, 2017, media activist [Mohammad Mustafa Ashour](#) was injured in his left eye by shrapnel, which made him lose sight with his left eye, as well as his right shoulder after a landmine of unknown origins exploded as he was covering the clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions on the battlefield of al Qal'a in Jabal al Turkman in the suburbs of Latakia governorate. As of this writing, we haven't been able to identify the group that planted the landmine.

[Mohammad](#) a photographer for al Ferqa al Aoula al Sahiliya, an armed opposition faction, from Latakia city, born in 1997, has an intermediate education, single.

SNHR spoke to the media activist Fadi Ahmad, a friend of Mohammad's, via Facebook, and he gave us his account of what happened:

“As Mohamad was covering clashes at the battlefield of Al Qal'a in Jabal al Turkman between the regime and the rebels, a landmine exploded near him, one of the shrapnel went into his left eye, which forced doctors to conduct a procedure to remove it. Also, a shrapnel went into his right shoulder.”



V. Recommendations

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Condemn the targeting of media activists in Syria and sheds 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.

International and Arabic media institutions

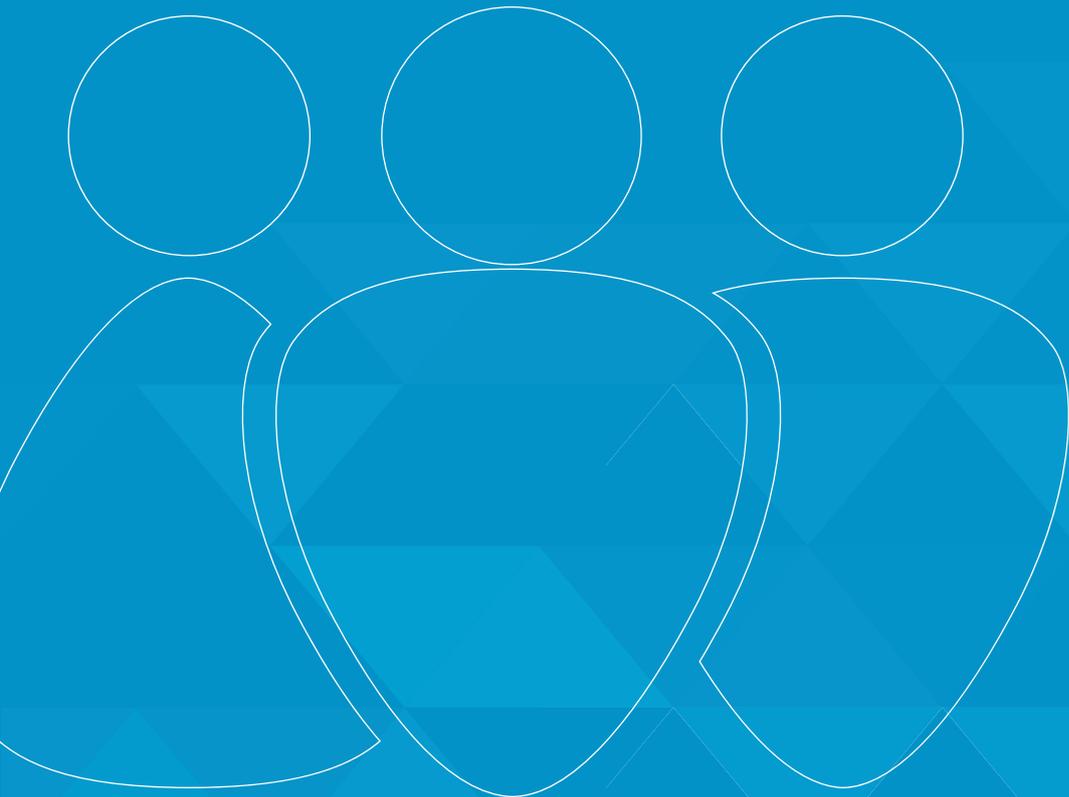
Advocate their colleagues in the field of media by publishing periodic reports that shed light on their daily suffering and memorialize their sacrifice. Also, they must contact their families to console them.

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

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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