

# **Four Media Activists Killed, One Injured, and Nine Arrested and Abducted, toll of September 2017**

The Syrian Regime Trumps all  
other Parties in Killing Media  
Activists



SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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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.”



The fourth round of negotiations was held in Astana city, Kazakhstan's capital, on 3 and 4 of May 2017. Russian, Turkish, and Iranian representatives attended as the sponsoring states of Ankara Ceasefire Agreement. The three states agreed on establishing four de-escalation zones, wherein the agreement is to commence on May 6, 2017. The agreement outlined four major areas for the de-escalation in Idlib governorate and the surrounding areas (parts of Aleppo, Hama, and Latakia governorates), northern Homs governorate, Eastern Ghouta, and parts of Daraa and al Quneitra governorates in the southern parts of Syria. It was provided that a special committee would accurately assign the borders of said zones at a later date. The agreement provided for a cessation of combat operations, passage of humanitarian aids, and for IDPs to go back to their areas.

Following an extensive round of talks between Russia, USA, and Jordan that commenced in May 2017 in Amman, Jordan's capital, the American and Russian presidents announced, on the sidelines of the 2017 G20 summit in Hamburg, that a ceasefire agreement has been reached in southwestern Syria – Daraa, Quneitra, and Suwayda governorates. The agreement went into force at 12:00 on Sunday July 9, 2017, and provided for the passage of humanitarian aids in addition to a ceasefire between the conflicting parties (Syrian regime forces and their allies on one side, and armed opposition factions on the other side). Also, the agreement specifies that maintaining security in this region is the Russian forces' responsibility in coordination with the Americans and Jordanians.

In addition, there have been a number of other local agreements in July and August 2017, such as Eastern Ghouta agreement between armed opposition factions, on one side, and officials from the Russian side, while a similar agreement was struck with the opposition in northern suburbs of Homs. However, the texts of these agreements haven't been made public on Russian government's websites, and the same for armed opposition factions who didn't publicize these agreements, except for Failaq al Rahman who published the [text of the agreement](#) on their official website. At the end of the agreement, according to the copy on Failaq al Rahman's website, a signature by a Russian sponsor was shown but without an explicit name, which was a grave mistake, as apparently all of this helps the sponsoring Russian side to easily dissolve from these agreements with no subsequent political or legal obligations and repercussions.

On Saturday, July 22, 2017, Russian Ministry of Defense announced that a de-escalation agreement has been signed in Eastern Ghouta following a round of talks between Russian military officials, on one side, and Jaish al Islam faction, on the other side, in Egypt's capital Cairo. The agreement was to come into effect at 12:00 of the same day. On Wednesday,



August 16, 2017, a Failaq al Rahman representative and a Russian representative signed an agreement in Geneva city that established Failaq al Rahman's inclusion in the de-escalation zone in Eastern Ghouta. The agreement was to come into effect at 21:00 of Friday, August 18, 2017.

On Monday, July 31, 2017, another de-escalation agreement was signed in Egypt's capital Cairo for northern Homs suburbs and southern Hama suburbs following a round of talks between armed opposition factions in the area and the Syrian regime represented by the Russian government as a sponsoring party, as the agreement was to commence at 12:00 on Thursday, August 3, 2017. Following the agreement's commencement, two meetings were held between a committee representing the military and civilian activities in northern suburbs of Homs and southern suburbs of Hama, on one side, and a Russian representative, on the other side, in a tent that was built for the meeting in a neutral area - near the al Dar al Kabira crossing in al Dar al Kabira village, northern suburbs of Homs governorate. The meeting was held to further discuss the provisions of Cairo's de-escalation agreement, as some armed opposition factions weren't fully in agreement with the de-escalation. Most notably, the two most recent agreements provided for a full cessation of hostilities between the conflicting parties in the relevant areas -with the exclusion of the areas in which ISIS and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham are present- and for humanitarian aids to enter these areas and for detainees to be released as per the demands of each party as to which detainees are to be released.

Since the agreements' commencement in the included areas, we have noticed a relatively good drop in the rates of killing in relation to the past months since March 2011. Nonetheless, 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 sponsoring parties- won't see are still going on as nothing had happened.

With the end of the sixth round of talks in the Kazakhstani capital, Astana, which were held over the course of two days (September 14-15, 2017), a de-escalation zone was [established](#) in Idlib governorate and the surrounding areas, as military forces were to be deployed (Russian, Turkish, and Iranian) to monitor the agreement, with the passage of humanitarian aids.



On September 19, Syrian-Russian alliance started a heavy offensive against Idlib governorate in response to Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's "Ya Ebadallah Uthbotou" battle. Supported by some opposition faction (The Islamic Turkistani Party, Jaish al Izza, and Jaish al Nukhba), Hay'at Tahrir al Sham started this battle in northeastern Hama governorate, as they took over some villages, but Syrian regime forces, backed by Russian forces, managed to re-seize the same areas on the same day. We have released [a report](#) documenting the most notable violations of the first week of that offensive. Subsequently, these forces expanded the offensive to include the suburbs of Aleppo and Hama governorates and Eastern Ghouta in Damascus suburbs.

In September, SNHR recorded that Syrian regime forces have resumed killing media activists as a policy, after a two-month stall, as Syrian regime forces topped all other parties by killing two media activists, while Russian forces returned to killing media activists after five months, where one media activist was killed by Russian forces in Idlib governorate. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, on the other hand, continues its policies of oppressing and arresting media activists in their areas of control for the third month in a row. Furthermore, we recorded an unprecedented rise in 2017 in the toll of media activists who were arrested by Self-Management 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 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.

SNHR incorporates a high-level documentation standard that draws upon direct accounts from survivors, victims' families, and local media activists, as this report includes five 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 have 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](#).

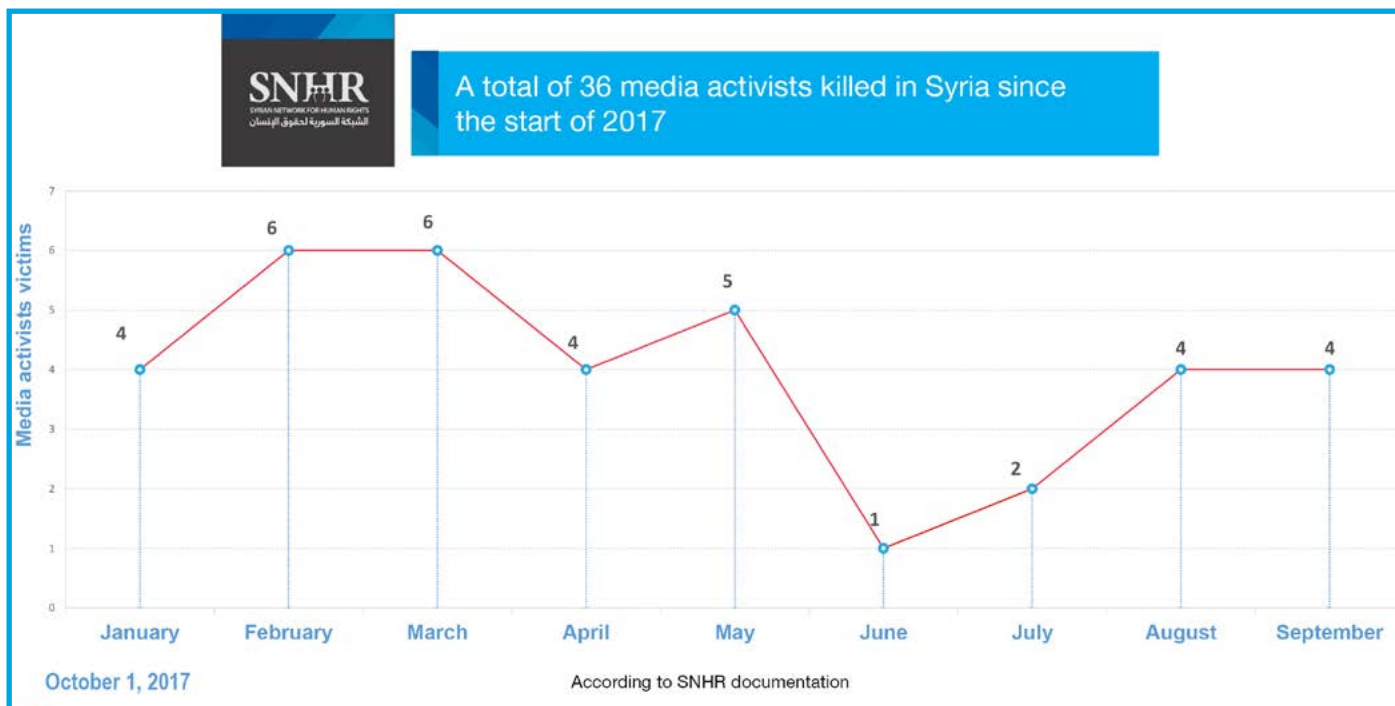
In light of the security and logistic difficulties to access all the areas where violations take place, it is worth noting that these statistics and incidents are only the bare minimum of the actual magnitude of crimes and violations that happened.



## II. Executive Summary

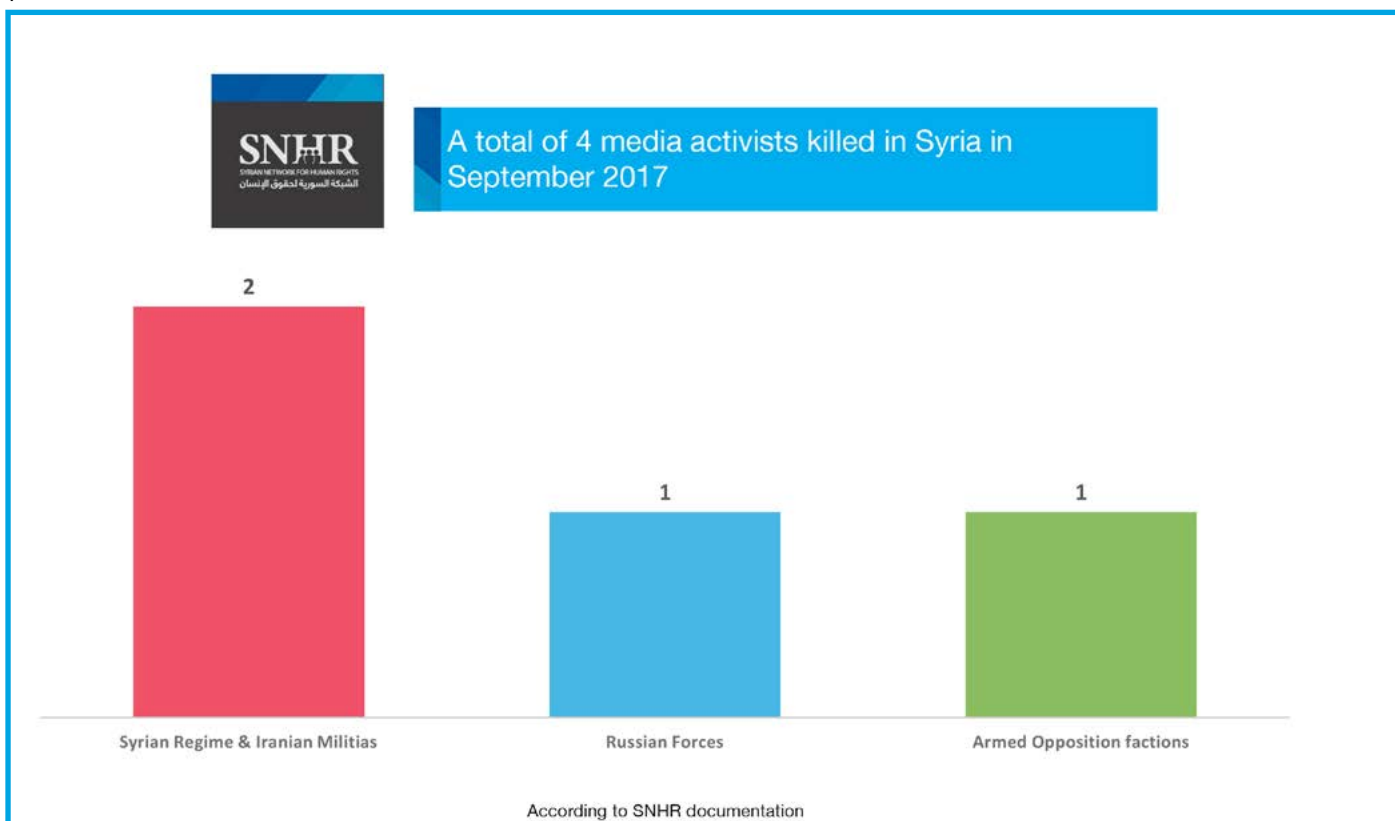
### A. Most notable violations against media activist in 2017

SNHR has recorded the killing of 36 media activists between the start of 2017 and October of the same year.



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

- **Acts of killing:** SNHR documented the killing of four media activists at the hands of the parties to the conflict,





as follows:

- Syrian regime forces: two media activists
- Russian forces: one media activist
- Armed opposition factions: one media activist

- **Injuries:** we recorded that one media activist were injured by Russian forces.

- **Arrest, abduction, and release:** we recorded 17 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): we recorded four cases of arrest, where one of the detained media activists was released later.

- Armed opposition factions: released one media activist

- Self-Management forces (primarily consisting of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party): we recorded four cases of arrest, where two of the arrested media activists were released later.

- Other parties: we recorded one abduction case where the abductee was released.

### III. Details

#### **A. Violations by Syrian regime forces**

- Acts of killing

##### **Adnan Qasem al Akrad**

Tuesday, September 12, 2017, Adnan was [killed](#) by a Syrian regime sniper who shot him in the head, as he was preparing a report documenting the violations to the truce by Syrian regime forces in al Manshiya neighborhood, [Daraa al Balad area](#), Daraa city. The neighborhood was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Adnan, [a photographer](#) for Ferqa 18, an armed opposition faction, from Tareeq al Sad neighborhood, Daraa al Mahata area, Daraa city, born in 1991, has a high school diploma, single.



Adnan al Akrad





SNHR contacted the media activist Abu Mahmoud al Hourani, a friend of Adnan's, via WhatsApp. Abu Mahmoud told us:

**“As Adnan was in al Manshiya neighborhood preparing the violations to the truce by Syrian regime forces, he was shot by a Syrian regime sniper. He was immediately rushed to Eissa Hajjaj Hospital in Tareeq al Sad neighborhood, where he died.”**

### **Anas Mahmoud al Najjar**

Monday, September 25, 2017, he was killed by shrapnel from a shell fired by a Syrian regime forces tank that landed near him, as he was covering the clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions on the battlefield of Housh al Dwahra, east of Damascus suburbs governorate.

Anas, photographer for Jaish al Islam, an armed opposition faction, from al Belaliya village, east of Damascus suburbs governorate, born in 1996, has an intermediate education certificate, single.

### **B. Russian forces**

#### **- Acts of Killing**

### **Mu'awiya Ibrahim al Shbeib**

Saturday, September 23, 2017, Mu'awiya was [killed in](#) a bombing by fixed-wing warplanes we believe are Russian that fired 14 missiles at least a training center for Failaq al Sham, an armed opposition faction. Mu'awiya was covering the graduation ceremony for a combat training course held by Failaq al Sham in Mardikh village, eastern suburbs of [Idlib governorate](#). The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Mu'awiya, [a photographer for Failaq al Sham](#), an armed opposition faction, and the media office of Mardikh village, from Mardikh village, born in 1997, has a high school diploma, single.

Media activist Mohammad Ibrahim al Shabib told us a few details regarding his relative Mu'away's killing via Facebook:

**“Mu'awiya was at a training center for Failaq al Sham in Mardikh village, covering a graduation ceremony for a combat training course held by Failaq al Sham. Russian warplanes launched approximately 16 missiles at the center, as Mu'awiya was killed along with tens of fighters. Because of the huge destruction in the center, we weren't able to pull out his dead body until the next day.”**



## - Injuries

### **Laith Ahmad al Abdullah**

Saturday, September 23, 2017, Laith's shoulder was dislocated, and he sustained a number of bruises all over his body, as fixed-wing warplanes we believe are Russian fired a missile near the rescue teams who were pulling out victims who were killed in a previous bombing that targeted a training center for Failaq al Sham in Mardikh village, eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, which is under the control of armed opposition factions.

Laith, [a photographer for the civil defense center in Saraqeb city](#), from Saraqeb city, eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in 1978, has a high school diploma, married. SNHR contacted Laith, via Facebook, who told us:



Laith al Abdullah

**“Mardikh village, in Idlib governorate suburbs, was targeted in a number of airstrikes by Russian forces. As I was working with a team from the civil defense center of Saraqeb city on documenting the bombing and aiding the wounded, the area was targeted with a thermobaric missile, and my shoulder was dislocated in the bombing, in addition to sustain minor bruises all over my body. The airstrike killed two of the injured we were trying to pull out as well. The bombing heavily destroyed the civil defense vehicle and our search and rescue equipment.”**

## **C. Extremist Islamic groups**

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

#### - Arrest and release

Ali Marsad

Saturday, September 2, 2017, Ali was arrested by members of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham who raided his place of residence in al Atareb city and seized his media equipment, before taking to one of their detention centers. He was released on Saturday, September 5, 2017.

Ali Marsad, a reporter for Halab News Agency, from al Atareb city, western suburbs of Aleppo governorate.



Ali Marsad



We contacted Ali, via Facebook, who told us about his arrest:

**“I was arrested by members from the Islamic police station in al Atareb city, suburbs of Aleppo governorate, from my house over charges of raping a woman that submitted a complaint against me. They took me to the police station, and kept me there for about two hours, before I was referred to Darat Ezza Court. I was held there for days because it was Eid al Adha holiday. I was released after I was acquitted of my charges because the claimant altered her testimony, and said that there is nothing between us.”**

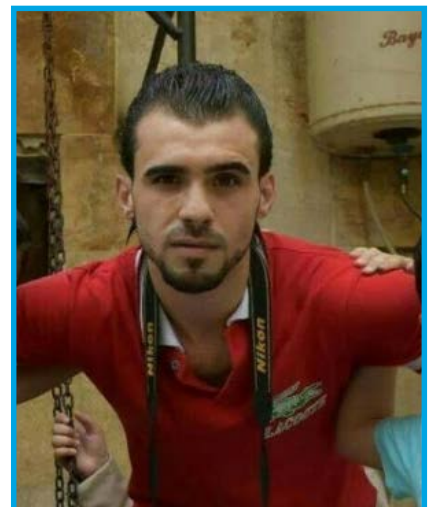
### **Ali Khaled al Mer’ie**

Sunday, September 10, 2017, Hay’at Tahrir al Sham summoned Ali to al Uqab branch to take his personal item that were being kept there after he was arrested earlier. However, they detained him again when he came back under the pretext of resuming the investigations. He was released on Thursday, September 21, 2017. It should be noted that Hay’at Tahrir al Sham had released Ali on Wednesday, August 30, 2017, after a 10-day detention. Ali, [a media officer at Syria Relief organization](#), from Hazzarin village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in 1992.

### **Abdul Karim al Halabi**

Saturday, September 23, 2017, Abdul Karim was arrested by armed members of Hay’at Tahrir al Sham from his place of residence in Darkoush city, western suburbs of Idlib governorate, to interrogate him regarding filming a demonstration against Hay’at Tahrir al Sham in Darkoush city. He was released an hour later.

Abdul Karim, a reporter for Baladi News Network, from Saif al Dawla neighborhood, Aleppo city.



Abdul Karim al Halabi



## Hazem Hussein Bakir

Saturday, September 16, 2017, Hazem was arrested by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham from his place of residence in Saraqeb city over refusing to support the civilian initiative proposed by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, and releasing statements from the local council of Saraqeb city rejecting the initiative, and also refusing to attend the Public Syrian Conference that was held on September 16 to form a civilian administration in the liberated areas. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham forced Hazem to sign pledges to never criticize Hay'at Tahrir al Sham again and that Saraqeb has to follow the civilian administration. He was released on the same day. Hazem, [media activist, from Saraqeb city](#), northern suburbs of Idlib governorate



Hazem Bakir

## **D. Armed opposition factions**

- Acts of killing

### **Khaled Omar al Shami**

Saturday, September 16, 2017, [he died](#) of wounds in his left thigh that he sustained two days earlier (Thursday, September 14), as he was hit by [a gunshot fired](#) by a fighter at a checkpoint for [Failaq al Rahman](#), an armed opposition faction, on the outskirts of [Hamouriya town](#), eastern suburbs of Damascus suburbs governorate, which is under the control of armed opposition factions. The fighter opened fire as a group snuck on them from Jaish al Islam-held areas.

[Khaled](#), known as Khaled al Umari, [head of the media](#) office of Zaid ben Thabet Civil Institution, from Hamouriya town, born in 1993, has a high school diploma, married and a father of one.



Khaled al Shami





Talking to Abdul Mu'in Homs, via Facebook, SNHR inquired about the details of his friend Khaled's murder:

**“On Thursday, September 14, Khaled was on his way back, along with a group of friends, from a farm. As the car he was in passed a checkpoint for Failaq al Rahman on the outskirts of Hamouriya town, clashes erupted between the fighters at the checkpoint and a group of Jaish al Islam fighters who tried to get close to them. Khaled was injured in his left thigh, as the bullet went through his insides. Khaled was rushed to Dar al Shefaa Hospital in Hamouriya town, where he underwent a surgery. Khaled didn't survive, due to his serious injuries, and died two days later.”**

- Release

### **Munib Abu Tayyem**

Sunday, September 10, 2017, Jaish al Islam, an armed opposition faction, released Munib. It should be noted that Munib was arrested on Tuesday, August 22, 2017, as Jaish al Islam raided his place of residence and seized his media equipment.

Munib, a reporter for Damascus Media Center, from Douma city, Damascus suburbs governorate, 19-year-old.



## **E. Self-Management forces (Consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party)**

- Arrest and release

### **Izzdin Saleh**

Thursday, September 14, 2017, Izzdin was arrested by Self-Management forces from his place of residence in Ras al Ein city. He was released on Friday, September 15, 2017

Izzdin Saleh, reporter for Arta FM Radio, from Ras al Ein city, northern suburbs of Hasaka governorate.



## Barzan Sheikhmous

Thursday, September 14, 2017, Barzan was arrested from his place of residence in Ras al Ain city, northern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, by Self-Management forces. He was taken to one of their detention centers, before he was released on Friday, September 15, 2017. Barzan Sheikhmous, [media activist](#), from Amouda city, suburbs of Hasaka governorate

## Ibrahim Ali al Suliman

Friday, September 15, 2017, Ibrahim was arrested by Self-Management forces from his place of residence in al Shaddadi city, southern suburbs of Hasaka governorate. He was taken to an undisclosed location. His fate is still unknown to SNHR as well as his family. Ibrahim [a reporter for Furat Post Institution](#), from Deir Ez-Zour city

## Ahmad Soufi

Friday, September 15, 2017, Ahmad was arrested by Self-Management forces, from his place of residence in al Malikiya city. He was taken to an undisclosed location. His fate is still unknown to SNHR as well as his family. Ahmad, a reporter for ARK TV Channel, from al Malkiya city, northeastern suburbs of Hasaka governorate, born in 1975.



Ahmad Soufi

## F. Other parties

### - Abduction

## Abdul Khaleq Ghannam

Friday, September 15, 2017, he was abducted by armed unknowns on the road between Darat Ezza city, western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, and Anadan city, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. On the same day, the abductors tossed him near al Rih al Mursala Hospital in Darat Ezza city, with signs of torture on his body, after they drugged him and seized his equipment.



Abdul Khaleq Ghannam



## IV. 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.

### **The sponsoring Russian side**

- 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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