86 Media Activists Killed, 44 Arrest and Abduction Cases, and 123 Injured in 2016

Two Media Activists Killed, and Five Injured in December 2016

SNHR

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 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 Ghani, 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."

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.

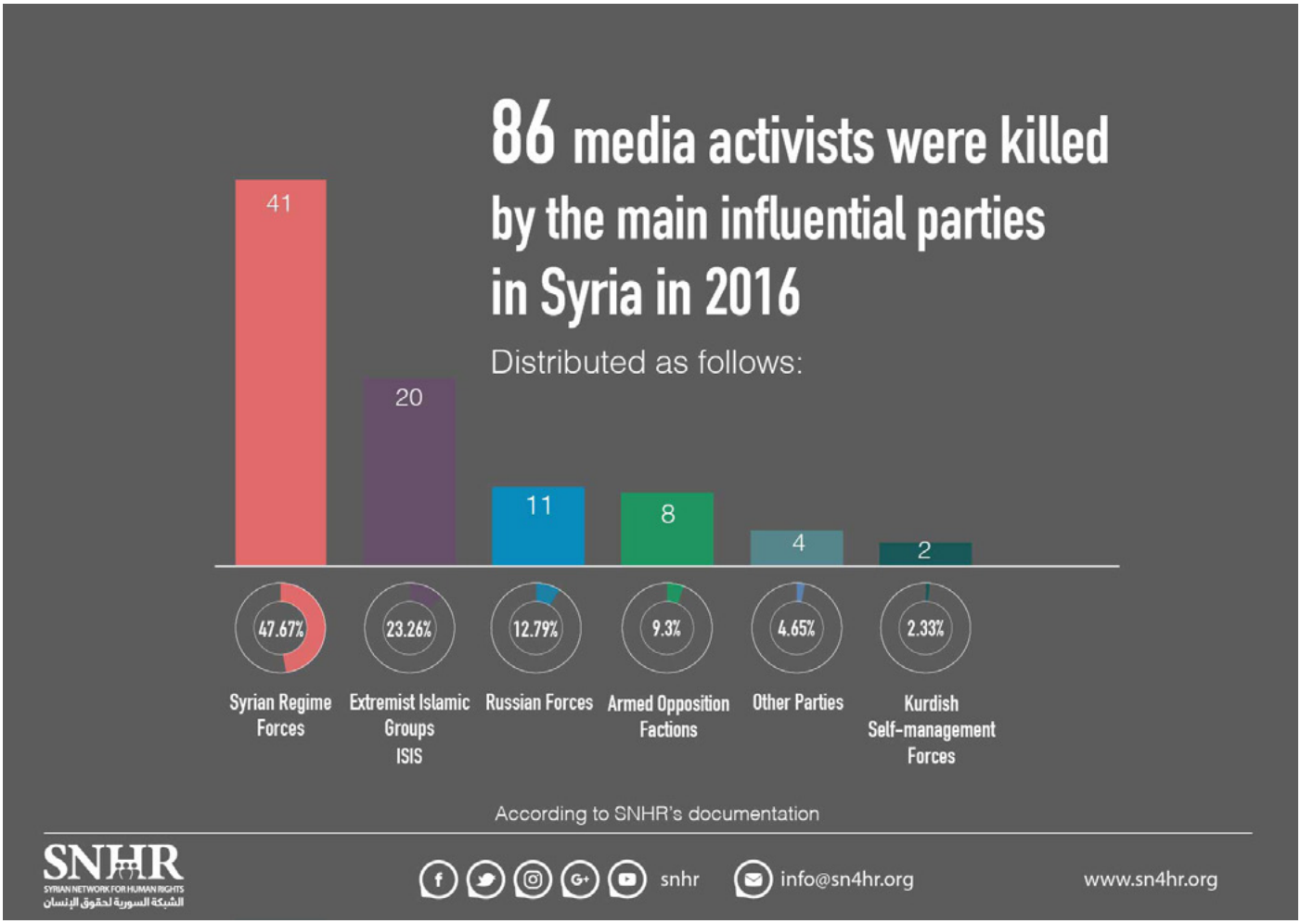
This report draws upon SNHR's archive and the investigations conducted by the Network in addition to accounts by victims' families, information from local activists, and analyzing the pictures and video footages that we have been receiving and archiving in our records since 2011.

to read more about SNHR methodology 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.

III. Executive Summary

• Violations against media activists in 2016



Violations against media activists for this year are divided as follows:

A. Extrajudicial killing

SNHR documented the killing of 86 media activists as follows:

- Syrian regime forces: 41 including one woman and four media activists who died due to torture.
- Russian force: 11
- Extremist Islamic groups:

ISIS: 20 including one woman

- Armed opposition factions: 8
- Kurdish Self-management forces: 2
- Other parties: 4

B. Injuries

We recorded 123 injuries as follows:

- Syrian regime forces: 73
- Russian forces: 31
- Extremist Islamic groups

ISIS: 8

- Armed opposition factions: 3
- Self-management forces: 2
- Other parties: 6

C. Arrest or abduction and releases

We recorded 55 cases of arrest, abduction, and release

- Syrian regime forces: we recorded two arrests cases, where the arrested two media activists were released later, and five other releases.
- Extremist Islamic groups

ISIS: we recorded one arrest case, where the arrested media activist was released later.

Fateh Al Sham Front (Formerly Al Nussra Front): we recorded 12 cases of arrest, where 11 of the arrested 12 media activists were released later (including one woman), and one other release

- Armed opposition factions: we recorded six cases of arrest, where five of the arrested six media activists were released, and three other releases.
- Kurdish Self-management forces: we recorded 13 cases of arrest, where 11 of the arrested 13 media activists were released later, and one other release.
- Other parties: We recorded 10 abduction cases, where nine of the abducted media activists were released, and one release by groups we couldn't identify.

D. Missing cases

We recorded two missing cases

E. Other violations against media activists

We recorded 18 incidents as follows:

- Syrian regime forces: 8
- Russian forces: 1
- Extremist Islamic groups:

Fateh Al Sham Front: 2

- Armed opposition factions: 4
- Kurdish Self-management forces: 1
- Other parties: 2

Violations against media activists in December 2016

Violations against media activists during the month of December 2016 are distributed as follows:

A. Killing: SNHR documented the killing of two media activists at the hands of the Syrian regime forces. One of the two media activists died due to torture.

B. Injuries: we recorded five injuries at the hands of the Syrian regime forces

C. Release and abduction: we recorded two cases as follows:

- Syrian regime forces: we recorded one release

- Other parties: we recorded one abduction, where the abductee was release later.

D. Other violations against media activists

We recorded two incidents; a female journalist's press visa was withdrawn, and a media office was bombed. Both incidents were by Syrian regime forces.

IV. Details

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

Killing

Sunday 11 December 2016, media activist Hasan Al Mahshi was killed in a bombing by fixed-wing Syrian regime warplanes which fired a missile that fell near him as he was heading to tend to the wounded who have fallen in a bombing by fixed-wing Syrian regime warplanes that fired missiles in Douma city, located in Damascus suburbs governorate and is under the control of armed opposition factions.

Hasan, a media activist for the civil defense administration, from Douma city in Damascus suburbs governorate, born in 1994, has an elementary education certificate, married and a father of one child.

Tuesday 27 December 2016, we received information confirming the death of Nabil Walid Sharbaji due to torture inside Sydnaya prison on 25 May 2015. It is worth noting that Nabil was arrested at an Air Force Intelligence checkpoint in Darayya city in Damascus suburbs governorate on 26 February 2012.

Nabil, a journalist and a blogger, from Darayya city in Damascus suburbs governorate, born in 1984, has a degree from the faculty of media at Damascus University.

Injuries

Monday 5 December 2016, media activist Omar Hussein Al Nammous sustained wounds in his left foot, hand, and shoulder after a barrel bomb dropped by Syrian regime helicopters fell near him as he was helping with treating the wounded who have fallen after Syrian regime helicopters dropped barrel bombs on Madaya town, located in Damascus suburbs governorate and is under the control of armed opposition factions.

Omar, a media activist for the civil defense administration, from Madaya town in Damascus suburbs governorate, born in 1995, has an intermediate education certificate, single.

Saturday 10 December 2016, media activist Reda Al Dimashqi "Abstained from revealing his name for security concerns" sustained wounds in his right hand and thigh after an artillery shell fired by Syrian regime forces fell near him as he was covering the shelling on Douma city, located in Damascus suburbs governorate and is under the control of armed opposition factions.

Reda, a photographer for Douma city coordination, from Douma city in Damascus suburbs governorate, born in 1998, has an intermediate education certificate, single.

> *SNHR contacted the media activist Reda Al Dimashqi, via Facebook, who provided us with his account:*
> *"After my friend Seraj Al Sham and I were done filming the artillery shelling on Douma city, and as I was riding my motorcycle, an artillery shell fell near us, which resulted in injuries in my right hand and thigh as well as my back. I was taken to the nearest medical point where I received treatment."*

Saturday 10 December 2016, media activist Seraj Al Sham "Abstained from revealing his name for security concerns" sustained a wound in his nose after an artillery shell fired by Syrian regime forces fell near him as he was covering the shelling on Douma city, located in Damascus suburbs governorate and is under the control of armed opposition factions.

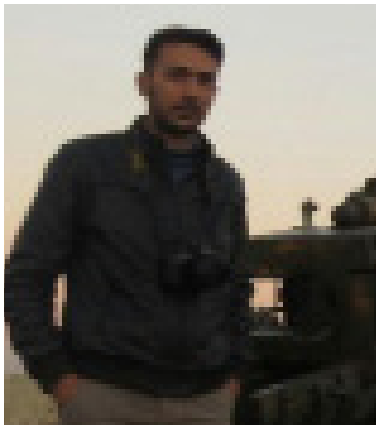
Seraj, a photographer for Douma city coordination, from Douma city in Damascus suburbs governorate, born in 1996, a university student at the faculty of media, single.

> *SNHR contacted Reda Al Dimashqi, a friend of Seraj Al Sham's, via Facebook: "Seraj was with me when we were hit in the artillery shelling by the Syrian regime on Douma city. However, Seraj was injured by shrapnel in his nose. He was immediately taken to the nearest medical point where he underwent a nose surgery."*

Tuesday 13 December 2016, media activist Mohab AbdulSalam sustained wounds in the abdomen and limps after an artillery shell fired by Syrian regime forces fell near him as he was covering the bombing on Al Mash-had neighborhood, located in Aleppo city and is under the control of armed opposition factions.

Mohab, a reporter and photographer for Theqqa agency and Enab Baladi, from Aleppo city, born in 1992, has an intermediate education certificate, single.

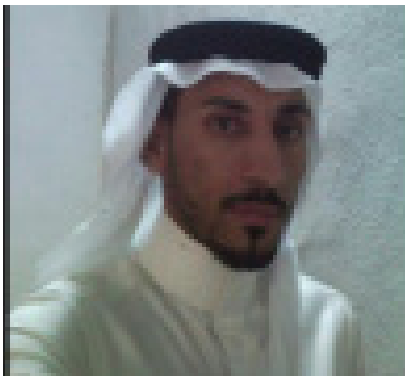
Tuesday 13 December 2016, media activist Suhail Hussein Al Ali was injured by shrapnel in the neck and right eye after a mortar shell fired by Syrian regime forces artillery fell near him as he was covering the clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions on the battlefront of Jam'ieyat Al Zahraa neighborhood in Aleppo city.



Suhail, a reporter for Nabd Syria TV channel, and the director of the office media for Al Ferqa Al Wusta, an armed opposition faction, from Tarmala town in the suburbs of Idlib governorate, born in 1988, has a high school diploma, married.

SNHR contacted the media activist Suhail Hussein Al Ali, via Facebook, who provided us with his account:
"On Tuesday 12 December, at 3:30 PM, as I was at the battlefront of Jam'iyeat Al Zahraa neighborhood in Aleppo city covering the clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions, a mortar shell fired by Syrian regime forces fell near me which resulted in wounds in my neck, and my right eye was injured as well. I was taken to Bab Al Hawa hospital for treatment."

Release



Thursday 22 December 2016, Syrian regime forces released the media activist Ibrahim Haji Al Halabi. It should be noted that Ibrahim was arrested on Saturday 12 May 2012 by Syrian regime forces at a checkpoint for Syrian regime forces in Tal Abyad city. The city was under the control of Syrian regime forces at that date, while it is now under the control of Self-management forces.

Ibrahim, known as Abu Al Tayyeb Al Souri, a member of the Syrian Revolution General Commission and the spokesperson for the opposition forces of the eastern region in Syria, from Tal Abyad city in Al Raqqa governorate, born in 1981.

Other violations against media activists

Thursday 15 December 2016, Syrian governmental authorities expelled the female journalist Cecilia Uddén after pulling her press visa under the pretext that she reported false news during her coverage of developments in Aleppo and Damascus cities.
Both of Sweden Radio and Reporters Without Borders condemned the expulsion of the female journalist. Cecilia Uddén, Radio Sweden's correspondent, from Sweden.

Friday 23 December 2016, Syrian regime forces dropped a number of barrel bombs on a complex containing the office of the media committee in Ain Al Fija village, located in Damascus suburbs governorate and is under the control of armed opposition factions. The building was partially destroyed, and its equipment was heavily damaged. As a result, the building was rendered out of commission.

B. Violations by other parties

Abduction and release

Thursday 8 December 2016, unknown armed men abducted the media activist Awad Al Seh Al Sheikh from his place of residence in Souran city in the suburbs of Hama governorate, and took him to an undisclosed location before releasing him on Sunday 11 December 2016. At the time of this writing, we haven't been able to find out the identity of his abductors.

Awad, a media activist and a member of Elaf relief organization, from Souran city in the suburbs of Hama governorate.

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.

ndependent 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 developments in Syria.

The Security Council

Work on fighting the policy of impunity by referring the cases in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

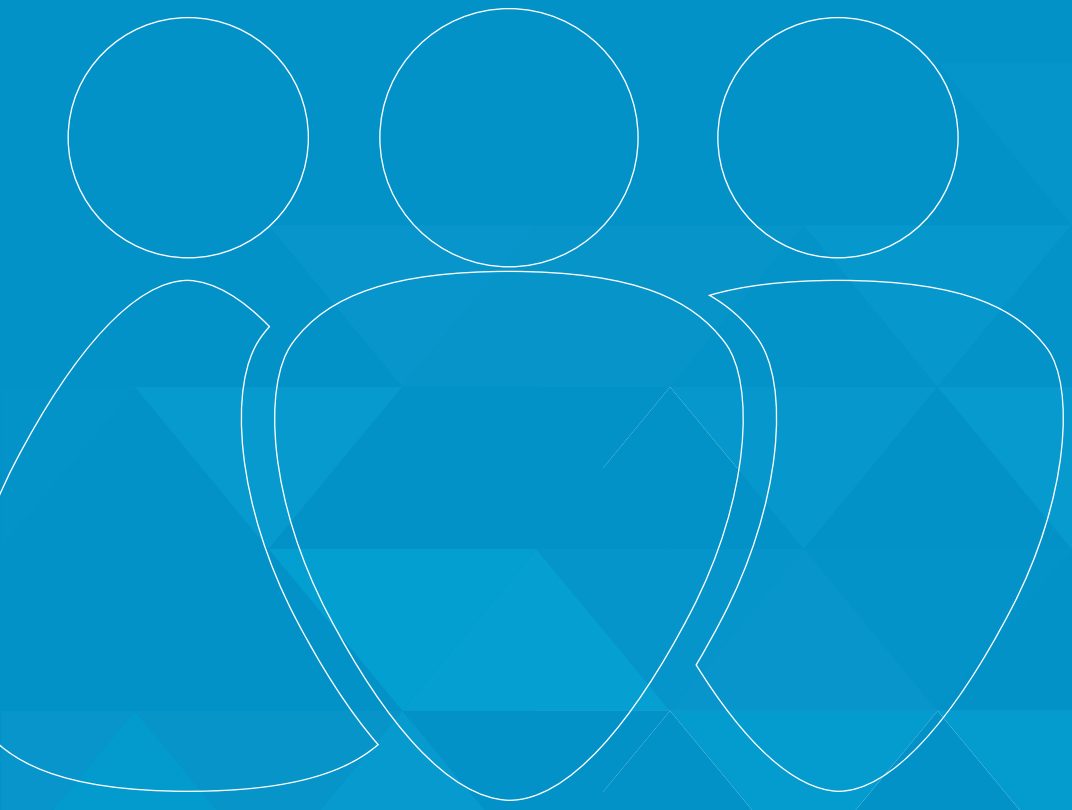
International and Arabic media institutions

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 majorly contributed to this report.



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