26 Media Activists Killed, 34 Injured, and 20Arrested and Abducted,Toll of the First Half of 2017

One Media Activist Killed and Five Injured in June

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Wednesday, July 5, 2017

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."

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 de-escalation areas – 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 an expert 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. Since the agreement went into effect, these areas saw a relatively noticeable and good decrease in killing rates compared with the previous 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 Russian, Turkish, and Iranian sponsors- won't see are still going on as nothing had changed.

SNHR has recorded in June an unprecedented drop in the number of media activists killed by Syrian regime forces following the commencement of the de-escalation 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.

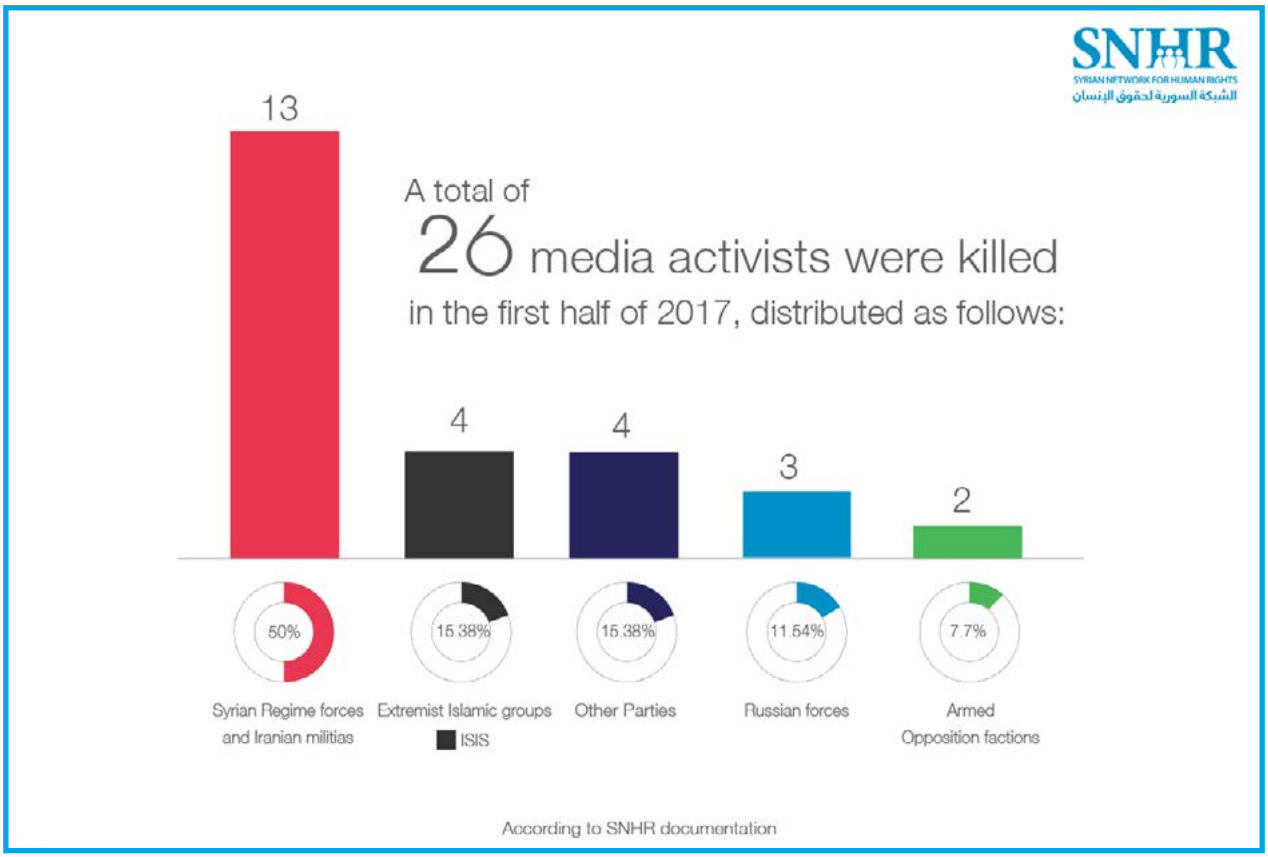
The report might include incidents that we believe do not constitute violations of the international humanitarian law. We include it, however, to record it among the incidents that resulted in casualties even though it was within the boundaries that the international humanitarian law allows for.

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:

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

A. Most notable violations against media activist in the first half of 2017



Violations against media activists in the first half of 2017 are distributed as follows:
First: killing: SNHR documented the killing of 26 media activists, as follows:
- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): 13
- Russian forces: 3
- Extremist Islamic groups
ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State): 4
- Armed opposition factions: 2
- Other parties: 4

Second: injuries: we recorded 34 injuries, as follows:
- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): 20
- Russian forces: 6
- Extremist Islamic groups
ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State): 4
- Armed opposition factions: 1
- Other parties: 3

Third: arrest, abduction, and release: we recorded 33 cases of arrest, abduction, and release
- Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): we recorded five cases of arrest including two women
- Extremist Islamic groups
Fateh al Sham Front (formerly al Nussra Front): we recorded seven cases of arrest, where the detained media activists were released later.
- Armed opposition factions: we recorded two cases of arrest, where the arrested media activists were released later.
- Kurdish Self-Management forces (primarily the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party): we recorded three cases of arrest, where two of the three arrested media activists were released later.
- Other parties: we recorded three cases of abduction by parties we couldn't identify. Two of the three abductees were released later.

Fourth: other violations against media activists: we recorded two incidents of assault on media offices by Syrian regime forces.

B. most notable violations against media activists in June

Violations against media activists during the month of June 2017 are distributed as follows:
First: Acts of killing: SNHR documented the killing of one media activist at the hands of Syrian regime forces.

Second: injuries: we recorded five injuries, as follows:
- Syrian regime forces, we recorded one injury
- Extremist Islamic groups
ISIS: we recorded three injuries
- Other parties: we recorded one injury

Third: 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

Mahran Rami al Karjousli

Friday, June 23, 2017, Mahran died of wounds in different parts of his body caused by a number of shrapnel from a bombing by fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes that fired a missile at his house in Hazza town, east of Damascus suburbs governorate. The town is under the control of armed opposition factions.

Mahran, known as Abu Rami Hazza, a photographer for "Hazza town" coordination and also cooperates with Smart News Agency, from Masaken Barza neighborhood, Damascus city, born in 1984, has a high school diploma, married and a father of two girls.

Mahran al Karjousli

SNHR contacted Yaman al Sayed, a friend of Mahran's, via Facebook. Yaman gave us his account:

> "On Friday, Syrian regime warplanes carried out several airstrikes in Hazza town, Eastern Ghouta. One of the airstrikes targeted the house of the media activist Mahran with a missile, while he was inside. He died immediately and the house was heavily destroyed. Also, four civilians were killed by the airstrikes on the houses that are located near Mahran's."

- Injuries

Mohammad Omar al Nabaki

Thursday, June 22, 2017, Mohammad suffocated from a poison gas and was injured by shrapnel in his right hand and left shoulder from a Syrian regime's grenade that was loaded with poison gas on the battlefront of Joubar neighborhood, northeastern Damascus city. The grenade was followed by an artillery shelling in the area. Mohammad was injured as he was covering the clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions there.

Mohammad, known as Dahham al Mazzawi, a reporter for Damascus Media Office, from al Mazza neighborhood, Damascus city, born in 1992, has a high school diploma,single.

Mohammad Omar al Nabaki

SNHR contacted the media activist Alaa al Ahmad, a friend of Mohammad's, via Facebook to inquire on the details of Mohammad's injury:
"as he was covering the clashes between the rebels and the regime on the battlefront of Joubar neighborhood, a bomb loaded with chlorine gas landed near him, which caused him to go into suffocation. Immediately afterwards, a tank shell fell near him and wounded his severely in his right hand and left shoulder. He was rushed to Ihya' al Nafs Hospital in Zamalka where he was treated."

- Other violations against media activists

The Office of Eastern Ghouta Reporters

Friday, June 23, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired two missiles at the Office of Eastern Ghouta Reporters media office in Hazza town, Damascus suburbs governorate. The office and its equipment (computers, cameras, a satellite transmitter) were destroyed almost completely. As a result, the office was rendered out of commission. The town is under the control of armed opposition factions.

B. Violations by extremist Islamic groups

- ISIS

- Injuries

Alaa Abdul Salam Mulla Sa'doun

Friday, June 9, 2017, Alaa was injured in the abdomen and right hand by shrapnel from a bomb dropped by an ISIS drone near him, as he was covering the clashes between the Kurdish-Majority Syrian Democratic Forces and ISIS on the western outskirts of al Mshallab neighborhood, east of Raqqa city.

Alaa, a reporter for Smart News Agency, from Ain al Arab city, northeast of Aleppo governorate, born in 1995, has a high school diploma, single.

Alaa Mulla Sa'doun

SNHR contacted Alaa, via Facebook, and he gave us his account:

> "As I was covering the clashes between the Kurdish-Majority Syrian Democratic Forces and ISIS on the western outskirts of al Mshallab neighborhood in Raqqa city, an ISIS drone shelled us with a bomb, which injured me along with my colleagues Radwan Othman and Rostom Hasan. Two shrapnel injured me in the abdomen and one in the right hand. I was rushed to a medical point in al Raqqa Samra village and then al Hzeima village, northern suburbs of Raqqa governorate, before I was transferred to Kobani hospital in Ain al Arab city, Aleppo suburbs. The doctors immediately tended to the wounds and did the necessary tests. There are two shrapnel in my body that are to be removed later."

Rostom Abdul Qader Hasan

Friday, June 9, 2017, Rostom was injured in the head by shrapnel from a bomb dropped by an ISIS drone near him, as he was covering the clashes between the Kurdish-Majority Syrian Democratic Forces and ISIS on the western outskirts of al Mshallab neighborhood, east of Raqqa city. Rostom, a reporter for al Itihad Press Agency, from Ain al Arab city, northeastern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, born in 1993, a university student at the faculty of literature and human sciences at Tishreen University – department of philosophy, single.

Rostom Hasan

Rostom told us, via Facebook, about his injury:

> "While I was with a group of media activists along with Syrian Democratic Forces covering the clashes with ISIS on the western outskirts of al Mshallab neighborhood in eastern Raqqa city at the entrance of al Sena'a neighborhood from the east side, an ISIS drone dropped bombs near where we were. I was injured along with two colleagues. We were immediately taken by Syrian Democratic Forces to a medical point in al Raqqa Samra village and then to another medical point in al Hzeima village -the two villages are in northern suburbs of Raqqa governorate- where I received first-aid, before I was taken to Kobani hospital in Ain al Arab city, Aleppo suburbs. I am still receiving treatment there. There were heated clashes between Syrian Democratic Forces and ISIS where I was injured. I saw two fighters get killed and one another that was injured."

Radwan Rashid Othman

Friday, June 9, 2017, Radwan was injured by shrapnel underneath his right armpit from a bomb dropped by an ISIS drone near him, as he was covering the clashes between the Kurdish-Majority Syrian Democratic Forces and ISIS on the western outskirts of al Mshallab neighborhood, east of Raqqa city.

Radwan, known as Radwan Bizar, a reporter for Kurdistan 24 TV Channel, from Tal Abyad city, northern suburbs of Raqqa governorate, born in 1985, a third-year student at the faculty of media at Damascus University, married.

Radwan Othman

SNHR contacted Radwan, via Facebook, and he gave us his account:

> "On Friday, June 9, I was with a group of media activists in al Raqqa al Samra village, northern suburbs of Raqqa governorate, to cover the clashes between Syrian Democratic Forces and ISIS in Raqqa city. We were asked to break into small groups of no more than three media activists to accommodate the forces inside the city and work on our reports. I was with the first group with my colleague Alaa Sa'doun, reporter for Smart Agency, and Rostom Abdul Qader, reporter for al Itihad Press."
>
> "Six fighters accommodated us to protect us into al Mshallab neighborhood at the end of the street that takes you to al Sena'a neighborhood. We heard the sound of a drone that we learned that it was for ISIS, it was carrying bombs. We tried to hide and protect behind the trees, while the fighters were shooting at it to steer it away. However, the drone dropped a bomb that fell three meters away from me and my friends. My injury was mild compared to them. The fighters took us immediately to a medical point in al Raqqa Samra village, and then to another one in al Hzeima village, northern suburbs of Raqqa governorate, where we received first-aid, before we were transferred to Kobani Hospital in Ain al Arab city, Aleppo suburbs, where the surgeon Bkhteiar Mudarres Hasan examined me. The doctor told me that he will remove the shrapnel from my body in a few days."

C. Violations by other parties

- Injuries

Mohammad Fateh Ahmad Raslan

Mohammad Fateh Raslan

Sunday, June 25, 2017, Mohammad was injured in the head and a tear in the eardrum membrane by shrapnel from an unknown-source IED that was inside a dumpster, as he was passing in his car near it in al Dbeid neighborhood, west sector of Idlib city. As of this writing, we haven't been able to identify the group that was responsible for the bomb. The city is under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Fateh al Sham Front.

Mohammad Fateh, a photographer for Step News Agency and Aleppo News Agency, from Aleppo city, born in 1995, has a high school diploma.

On the following day, we contacted Mohammad Fateh, via Facebook, to know more about his injury:

> "Around 2:00 PM, on Sunday, June 25, I was driving my car going home back from the market. I was passing through al Dbeit neighborhood, Idlib city, and an IED that was placed inside a dumpster as I got near it. Some shrapnel injured me in the head, and I wasn't able to hear from the pressure created by the explosion. I was rushed, along with a guy who owns a grocery store near the dumpster, to al Iyadat Hospital in Idlib city. The doctors examined me and provided first-aid. They told me that the grocery store's owner's injury was critical because a shrapnel got into his abdomen. The explosion also damaged my car, which was hit with a number of shrapnel, and shattered the window. To this moment, I am not able to hear properly and I am still feeling pains in my face."

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.

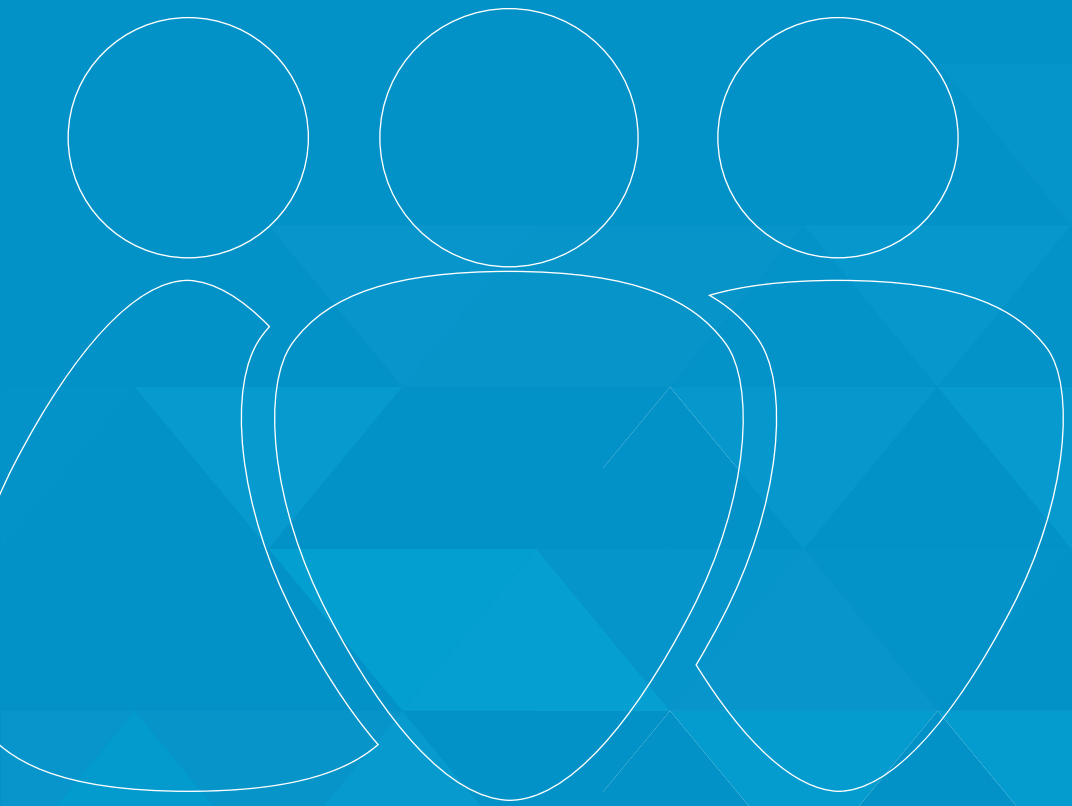
International and Arabic media institutions

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 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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