



Violations against Media Activists during July 2015

6 Media Activists Killed, 8 kidnapped, and 10 Injured in July 2015

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I. Executive Summary:

Violations against media activists in July 2015 are documented as follows:

A. **Killing:** SNHR documented the death of 6 media activists, detailed as follows:

- i. Government Forces (army, security forces, local militias, foreign Shitte militias) killed 3 media activists, amongst one media activist died under torture.
- i. Extremist Groups:
-ISIL killed 2 media activists.
- iii. Armed Opposition Groups killed one media activist.

B. **Arresting and Kidnapping** We recorded 8 kidnapping cases and 4 releases, detailed as follows: 2 media activists were released by government forces, 1 activist was released by An-Nusra front, and 1 activist was also released by armed opposition groups.

- i. PYD Kurdish Forces kidnapped two media activists
- Extremist Islamic Groups:
 - ii. An-Nusra Front: kidnapped one media activist
 - iii. Armed Opposition Groups: kidnapped one media activist
- iv. Unidentified Groups: Kidnapped 4 media personnel, including 3 foreign journalists.

C. **Injuries:** We recorded 10 injuries, detailed as follows:

- i. Government Forces: injured 5 media activists
- Armed Opposition Groups: injured 5 media activists

D. **Violations against Properties:** We recorded 1 case, detailed as follows:

Government Forces: one case was recorded





II- Introduction:

Since the beginning of the uprising in March 2011, the Syrian media arena has been losing its prominent media activists each month, who risk their lives to document crimes being committed against Syrian citizens. They were killed, arrested, kidnapped, harassed, seriously injured, suffered from permanent injuries, or forced to disappear amidst international silence that ignored their suffering, basic rights to be protected and safe and without holding the perpetrators accountable for their violations against them.

SNHR recorded a notable rise in the number of activists killed during May and June 2015, most of them were killed while documenting government shelling or in different war zones between armed groups. Government forces are ranked first when it came to committing these crimes, followed by Daesh (known as ISIS). On the other hand, An-Nusra front and other armed opposition groups' crimes were limited to kidnapping or beating media activists. PYD forces were categorized as the least among all groups to harm journalists.

SNHR affirms the importance of protecting mass media in Syria, renews its condemnation of all violations committed against media activists, and assures the importance of respecting the freedom of working in media. The International community, characterized by the Security Council has to hold liability for not protecting journalists and media activists in Syria.

III- Methodology:

A citizen journalist is anyone who plays an important role in covering and publishing news even if he is not impartial as opposed to what a journalist should be.

When a citizen journalist carries a weapon and gets involved directly in armed clashes, he is no longer a citizen journalist unless he completely retires from military action.

This report is based mainly on SNHR's archives and investigations in addition to the testimonies of victims' families and relatives. Information we collected from local activists, and the verified pictures and videos we receive and add to our archives that we have been updating regularly since 2011.

It should be noted that these statistics and facts are the bare minimum of the violations and crimes that happened in light of the security and logistic difficulties and challenges we are facing in order to reach the locations where these violations occurred.





IV- Report Details:

A. Government Forces' Violations (army, security forces, local militias, foreign Shitte militias)

► Extrajudicial killing:

On 2 July 2015, Abdulhamid Al Sayyed, nicknamed as Abu Ammar Al Binnishi, a member of Ahrar Al Sham media office, died of his wounds due to barrel bomb fragments dropped by government aviation on Binnish in Idlib suburbs.



Abdulhamid Al Sayyed

On 19 July 2015, Ahmad Taha, nicknamed as Abu Al Waleed, a media activist for the armed opposition groups was killed due to an artillery missile fragment launched by government forces on Al Turkman Mountain in Lattkia suburbs.



Ahmad Taha

On 31 July 2015, Mazen Mohamad Bader Al Deen Al Dirani, a media activist, died under torture in one of the government detention centers in Damascus. We learned from his family that they were notified of their son's death when security forces told them to receive his body and his death certificate in Teshreen Military Hospital in Damascus.

Mazen was born in Douma in Damascus suburbs in 1987. He was a media activist and graduated from the Institute of Filming and Acting and was arrested by government forces on 6 November 2013 at a checkpoint in Palmyra Roundabout in Homs. His family informed us that he was in good health when he was arrested.



Mazen Mohamad Bader Deen Al Dirani

SNHR spoke to Mazen's brother, Mohamad Al Dirani who is currently living in Turkey, he said:

“My brother Mazen was arrested at Palmyra Roundabout in Homs. There was no news about him then even though we tried to ask for any information about him. Mazen graduated from the Institute of Filming and Acting, he was a media activist during the protests and launched a number of facebook campaigns.





After trying to acquire any information about him, security forces informed my mother of his death on 13 July 2015. She was asked to go to Tishreen Military Hospital in Damascus to receive my brother's body. My mother saw Mazen's body. He was pale and the torture signs were visible all over his body. He suffered from malnutrition that was obvious on his skinny body. Also, he had scars and bruises from the torture and beating he was subjected to. No one from my family dared to videotape or take pictures of Mazen's body. He was buried quickly fearing the security surveillance for the family.

[His death certificate](#)

[A medical report of his cause of death](#)

► **Injuries:**

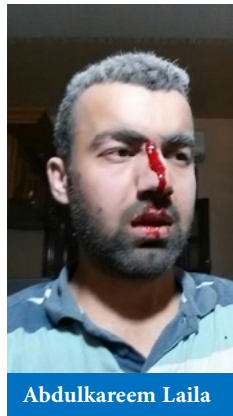
On 2 July 2015, media activist Alaa Barsilo was injured with a shrapnel of an artillery missile that was launched by government forces on Jame'ya Al Zahraa neighborhood in Aleppo while he was documenting the clashes there.



Alaa Barsilo



Saleh Laila



Abdulkareem Laila

On 6 July 2015, media activists Abdulkarim Layla, nicknamed as "Abu Firas Al Halabi" and his cousin, media activist Saleh Layla were injured due to a shrapnel from a surface-to-surface rocket while they were covering the news of clashes there.

On 16 July 2015, Aleppo News Network correspondent, nicknamed as Abu Ezz Al Halabi, was injured due to shrapnel from a rocket launched by government warplane shelling on Al Nayreb neighborhood in Aleppo.





On 31 July 2015, Al Jazeera correspondent in Idlib Alaa Deen Hamdoun, nicknamed as “Adham Abu Al Housam” was injured with his wife when a barrel bomb was dropped on their house in Binnish in Idlib suburbs. Large parts of his house were destroyed.

[Shelling aftermath on Alaa Deen Hamdoun’s house](#)



► **Releases:**

On 17 July 2015, writer Hani Zaytani blogger Houssein Ghareer were transferred from Al Swaida Prison to Adra Prison, then to the Criminal Security Branch in Bab Musala in Damascus where they were released.

However, the fate of the journalist and human rights activist, Mazen Darweesh, the founder and head of the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Speech is still unknown after he was transferred on 19 July 2015 from Hama Central Prison to the State Security Branch in Hama. According to the statement of the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Speech, there is no information about him up to the moment of making this report.

It should be noted that releasing media activists is still subjected to their trials at the Anti-Terrorism Court in Damascus. However, on 22 July 2015 the judge postponed the verdict to 31 August 2015 regarding the case of the Syrian Center for Media and Human Rights, which is the 25th postponement in a row.





B. PYD and YPG Kurdish Forces:

► Arrest and Kidnapping:

On 22 July 2015, writer Abdulkarim Basheer Khodor, known as “Hakim Rafi”, a Kurdish Language instructor and a member of the administrative Hasak Branch for the Writers Union, was arrested from his work place in Al Mufti neighborhood in Al Hassaka. He was taken to an unknown location. This arrest case was one among an arrest campaign against prominent Kurdish citizens. The YPG justified their arrest campaign by accusing the arrested individuals of supporting armed groups and facilitating its movements.



On 26 July 2015, journalist [Jandra Shrankhi](#), Kurdistan TV correspondent, and a member of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Party was arrested by the PYD forces from Al Swees neighborhood stadium in Al Qamishli City in Al Hassaka governorate without a statement or a clear reason.

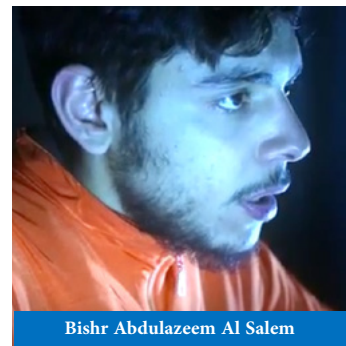


C. Extremist Islamic Groups:

ISIL:

On 5 July 2015, ISIL broadcasted a video entitled “ Be careful, They Are the Enemy” the depicted shooting to death two media activists from Raqqa Being Slaughtered in Silence campaign. The victims were tied to a tree and shot from a long distance.

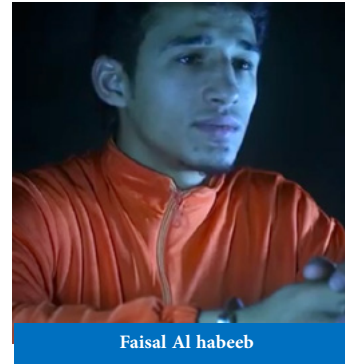
The victims are: Bisher Abdulazeem Al Salem, born on 1995, from Al Thakana neighborhood in Raqaa and Faisal Al Habeeb, born on 1994 from Al Raqqa city.





Before their execution, Bisher and Faisal were forced to appear in a video where they acknowledged that they received money in exchange of broadcasting news, according to the ISIL video.

ISIL arrested Bisher on 23 March 2015 in Tal Abyad in Raqqa, while Faisal was arrested on 4 April 2015 from Al Wadi Street in Al Raqqa while he was uploading videos and pictures on the internet in one of the internet cafés in Raqqa City.



Faisal Al habeeb

An-Nusra Front:

► Kidnapping:

On 23 June 2015, Japanese journalist, Joubi Yasouda, an independent journalist born in 1974, was arrested in Idlib next to the Turkish borders by An-Nusra Front members.

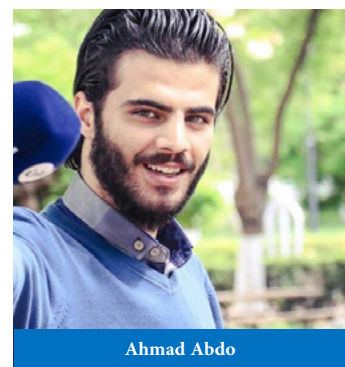
Some of the activists there told us that Yasouda had a prior authorization from Ahrar Al Sham movement to enter the Syrian lands to conduct journalistic reports. Then, he went to Salhab town that is located in Jisr Al Shougour suburbs that is under the control of An-Nusra where contact with him was lost. There is no update about his case or information up to the moment of making this report.

Release:

On 28 July 2015, media activist Ahmad Abdo, Al A'an News TV reporter was released after he was arrested by An-Nusra front from his house in Al Ya'akubiya town in Idlib suburbs on 18 May 2015. Prior to his arrest, members from An-Nusra front raided his house and confiscated all his technological equipment.



Joubi Yasouda



Ahmad Abdo





D. Armed Opposition Groups:

► Extrajudicial Killing:

On 27 July 2015, journalist Thaer Al Ajlani was killed with a mortar missile shrapnel in Jobar neighborhood in Damascus suburbs that came from an armed opposition group region. Thaer was covering the news in a military region accompanied by government forces. He was born in 1982 and worked as a military correspondent for a number of media platforms, including Sham F.M Radio and LBCI TV station. He was the head of the media department in The National Defense Center in Damascus.



Thaer Al Ajlani

► Injuries:

On 19 July 2015, media activist Karam Al Masri was shot in his hand by one of the residents in Al Kalasa neighborhood in Aleppo. This incident happened after an altercation with the residents after they objected on videotaping the shelling aftermath by government forces. Karam was beaten and cursed with his colleague, and then the residents confiscated his personal gun and camera. The perpetrators ran away afterwards. SNHR spoke to Karam and he told us the details of what happened:

“The residents attacked me in Al Kalasa neighborhood while I was videotaping the government warplane shelling on the neighborhood. After an altercation with the residents we were accused that we were the reason why government warplanes shelled them. It soon escalated to physical offence. Then one of the residents shot us directly. I was shot and the paramedic survived and my personal gun was stolen, in addition to my camera and mobile phone. They were almost 20 individuals; most of them were related to one family”



Karam Al Masri

On 31 July 2015, Shadi Helwa, the Syrian State TV reporter, photographer Fadi Kharouf, and SANA State News Agency photographer George Orfilian were injured with shrapnel of an artillery missile that came from one of the armed opposition forces, Faylak Al Sham that affiliated to Aleppo Victory party while they were covering the clashes in Aleppo accompanied with government forces.

[From right to left: Shadi Helwa, Fadi Kharouf, and George Orfilian](#)





► **Kidnapping:**

On 17 July 2015, the head of Khotwa News Agency, Fares Al Halabi, was beaten and detained for hours by Abu Amara Brigade in Aleppo city. His camera was confiscated and forced to delete everything he captured. The brigade objected the fact that he videotaped the Eid-Al-Fitr sermon in Hamza mosque in Al Mashhad neighborhood in Aleppo.

SNHR spoke to Fares and he told us the details of this assault:



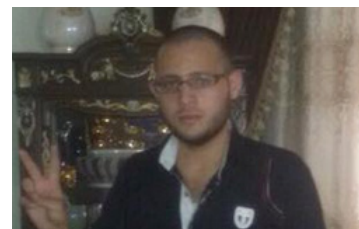
Fares Alhalabi

“What happened is that Abu Amara Brigade assaulted my team under the pretext of picturing civilians’ faces. After me and my friends left the mosque, a friend of mine was assaulted by an armed man from Abu Amara brigade and his camera was confiscated. They started shouting at my friends and asked to delete what we videotaped. When I approached them, three gunmen attacked and arrested me. They cursed us and took me to their headquarters that was next to the mosque in Al Mashhad neighborhood in Aleppo. They forced me to delete all the videos and pictures, and then I was released. There were 3 media platforms covering the Eid sermon and when I was attacked, all of them ran away fearing the same fate. The next day, one of the leaders in Abu Amara brigade apologized for what happened and promised us that the perpetrators will be held accountable. We are still waiting for that to happen.

► **Releases:**

On 7 July 2015, media activist in Misraba Coordination, Anas Al Khawli, was released from Al Islam Army in eastern Ghouta in Damascus suburbs after being arrested in the same city on 30 June 2015. He was arrested by the Islam Army since he was videotaping protests that criticized the bad living situations in eastern Ghouta. Also, the protests called for releasing the imprisonment of detainees from Al Islam Army prisons, demanded breaking the siege and igniting the fronts.

SNHR spoke to Anas Al Khawli about what happened to him:



A picture of Anas Al Khawli with his hair was cut



A picture of Anas Al Khawli before he was arrested by Al Islam Army.





“Al Islam Army put me in a solitary confinement and I was brought in every day for investigations. I was not beaten or assaulted physically, but I was psychologically traumatized. The next day after my arrest, they cut of my hair and was not allowed to take a shower until the day I was released. I begged the armed man from Al Islam Army not to cut my hair and told him: “My wedding is after the Eid.” He said: “Who told you that you will be released on Eid?” I had to sign a written pledge that states that I will not videotape any anti-Islam Army protest since “it jeopardizes their security”. A number of revolutionary parties played a positive role in my release.”

► **Other violations:**

On 17 July 2015, media personnel, Abdul Mine'm Junaid, editor in chief of Sada Al Balad newspaper was prohibited from videotaping the Eid sermon in Hamza Mosque in Al Mashhad neighborhood in Aleppo by Abu Amara brigade. I had to stop and leave the mosque fearing a clash with them.

SNHR spoke to Abdul Mine'm about what happened:

“I was prohibited from videotaping under the pretext of videotaping civilian faces. I left the mosque directly fearing an armed clash with them and did not dare to publish my photos or videos.”



Abdul Mine'm Junaid

E. Unidentified Groups:

On 13 July 2015, three Spanish journalists were abducted. They are: Antonio Pamilga, Ankhel Lopez Sasteri, and Jose Manuel. They were kidnapped by an unidentified group while they were in Al Ma'adi neighborhood in Aleppo. The neighborhood is under the control of An-Nusra front and armed opposition groups. The Spanish journalists were conducting a report and covering the news in that region. Their relatives stated in a press statement that the journalists were kidnapped and they lost contact with them. The Syrian translator Ousama Ajan, from Aleppo, who was with the journalists, was also kidnapped.





The Spanish journalists entered the Syrian lands on 10 July 2015 with a permit from Ahrar Al Sham brigade and were protected by them as well. However, they entered Al Ma'adi neighborhood without the brigade members at the journalists' perusal. The journalists are considered experienced military correspondents and members of Reports without Borders in Spain. They covered a number of conflicts in different parts of the world including Syria.

SNHR spoke to the translator's brother, Ahmad Ajan, born in 1979 and works as a lecturer of English Language in Intab University in Turkey:

“My brother Ousama is an English teacher and a freelance translator and unfortunately there is no enough information about them other than what was stated in different international media agencies”

The three reporters were kidnapped after two days of entering Al Ma'adi neighborhood by armed men whose identity remains unknown up to the moment of making this report. It is worth mentioning that that no party adopted this kidnapping case. The Prime Minister's Office is contacting me daily and we are working to find my brother and the three journalists as long as it takes.”

3-On 24 July 2015, Media personnel Anas Khatab, known as Naked Al Byanouni, a reporter for SMART news agency and a member of Byanoun media office was kidnapped by an unidentified group while he was coming back to his city Byanoun in Aleppo. He was abducted by the power of guns and then taken to a detention place where he was interrogated for hours, threatened to be killed then released the other day.



Anas Alkhatib





SNHR spoke to Anas and he told us the details of what happened:

“On Friday while I was coming back from Aleppo on a motorcycle, several men chased me with their cars and forced me to stop after I hit a cement block. Four men with covered faces surrounded me and one of them pulled a gun to my face and threatened to kill me. They tied my hands and put me in an iron box that looked like a coffin and locked it. One of the masked men took my bike and followed the car. We arrived after an hour and a half to place where I was put in a locked room. When I started to speak and ask why I was held captive, I was always met with death threats. They interrogated me for two hours and their questions were about my media activist work. They always indicated that I was lying and said: “we know everything about you. There’s no need to deny and lie”. They threatened to killed or to cut off my fingers in order to stop writing. They took me to a street and released me with promises of re-arrest in case I go back to reporting the news. I was not able to identify the identity of the perpetrators since they were cautious enough to cover their faces and who they were.”

Acknowledgment

Our thanks go out for the victims’ families and activists who contributed majorly to this report.

