

May 2018

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In May 2018: 7 violations including killing a media professional

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Introduction

The Syrian Center for Journalistic Freedoms of Syrian Journalists Association SJA documented 7 violations against media in May 2018 in Syria. 6 out of 7 violations occurred in May while one violation occurred in last March but the center documented it after verifying according to the criteria of documentation .

Hence, the curve of violations documented in May is similar to that in April when 6 violations were documented .

The second quarter of 2018 has witnessed a noticeable decrease in the number of violations comparing to that in the first quarter of the year 2018 (January: 10 violations, February: 11 violations, March: 14 violations(

Despite the stop of military operations in most regions of the country but May witnessed a change in the type of violations comparing to that in April when no cases of killing or injuring were documented. Armed opposition's factions and security chaos are the main reasons for violations against media documented in May 2018 .

For the second month in row, the armed Syrian opposition tops those responsible for violations by committing 3 violations .

Opposition's general security forces in Aleppo's Azaz committed 2 violations while Fatih Sultan Mehmet brigade committed one violation .

The Turkish police Jandarma and Lebanese security forces committed a violation each while 2 other violations were committed by unidentified parties .

The Center documented the killing of one media professional and the injury of another one .

Media activist Ibrahim Abdulrazaq al-Manjar was assassinated by unidentified armed group that shot him directly in front of his home in Daraa .

So, the number of killed media professionals documented by the Center has risen to 431 since 2011 .

The violations documented have not been limited to killing cases but also included injury of media professionals, arrest and detaining, hitting and denial of media coverage .

Media activist Badr Talib was injured by Turkish police jandarma while dispersing a protesting by people in Aleppo's al-Bab .

Meanwhile, Lebanese security forces arrested Zaman al-Wasl correspondent Abdulhafiz al-Hawlani from the camp of Lebanese Aarsal town .

Media activist Wael Adel and photographer Omar Hafiz were subjected to hitting, cursing and denial of media work by members of general security in Aleppo's Azaz .

Media activist Anas Abu Adnan also was subjected to denial of media coverage by unidentified armed group while he was documenting humanitarian situation of forcibly displaced from Homs .

In addition, the Center documented in May the arrest of media activist Ahmad Shafie Bilal on March 28, 2018 by Fatih Mehmet Sultan brigade in Aleppo's Afrin under the pretext of media work against the brigade. He was released on May 10, 2018 .

As for geographical distribution, violations occurred mainly in Aleppo as it witnessed 4 violations while provinces Homs and Daraa witnessed one violation each .

One violation was committed in Lebanon to be the first violation against Syrian media professional documented out of Syria .

Finally, The Center documented in previous month the release of media activist Ahmad al-Akhras on Saturday, April 28, 2018 after one month of his arrest by Hayet Tahrir al-Sham HTS in Idlib .

Summary of violations

This report monitors violations committed against media in Syria or against Syrian media professionals out of Syria in which the Center documented in May 2018 .

1-Killing

The center documented one case committed by unknown parties

2-Injury

The center documented one case committed by Turkish police Jandarma

3- Arrest and detaining

Two cases were documented as following:

*Armed opposition is responsible for one case as Mehmet Fatih Sulatn brigade detained one media professional and released him after 45 days of the arrest .

*Lebanese security forces arrested a Syrian media professional and and released him after one week of the arrest

4-Hitting media professionals and denial of practicing media work

Two cases documented committed by armed opposition in Aleppo's Azaz

5-Arbitrary denial of media coverage

One case documented committed by unidentified parties

6- Release of media professionals:

One case documented in which media professional was arrested by HTS

Important note :

Violations monitored in this report are violations documented by the Center and verified according to criteria of documentation. There might be other violations that occurred but the Center has not known about them or could not verify them so they are not mentioned in the report .

Criteria used by the Center in documenting violations

The Syrian center for journalistic freedoms rely on certain criteria in documenting violations, committed by different conflicting parties in Syria,

against journalists and media activists according to international laws that protect journalists' rights. The Center documents violations in a professional way taking into consideration the accuracy and transparency in gathering information and analyzing it and putting it into its correct legal context and frame .

The Center performs its work out of deep believing in the duty to document violations against media professionals and defending their rights to be compensated in future and assure no impunity for violators. The Center aspires to reach free unbiased media and achieve justice and equality in future Syria .

Criteria

1- Violations against media professionals:

The Center documents violations committed against media professionals in Syria regardless of their nationality, race, gender, denominator, media agency they work for, or violator. The Center also documents violations against Syrian media professionals out of Syria. The Center also documents violations committed against media centers and organizations. The Center does not publish news of violations in case the victims or their families ask not to be published .

2- Violations occur while performing media work

The Center documents violations against media professionals while performing their media work whether hit directly or indirectly .

3- Media professional in connection with armed work :

The Center abstain from documenting such cases

4- Media professional covering armed work

The Center documents violations committed against media professionals covering armed forces under the condition of having no connection with armed work.

Killing of media professional

Media activist Ibrahim Abdulrazaq al-Manjar was assassinated on Thursday, May 17, 2018 by an armed unidentified group. He was shot directly in front of his home in Daraa, south of Syria.

“Ibrahim died directly after being shot by 3 bullets. One bullet hit his neck and the others hit his chest. He was shot by unknown gunmen on a motorcycle in front of Ibrahim’s home in the town Sayda at 7 p.m. May 17, 2018.” Ibrahim’s colleague and media activist Jaafar Abu al-Agha told the Syrian Center for Journalistic Freedoms.

Ibrahim was threatened several times by ISIS because of his media activity. ISIS accused him of circulating news about the group and causing one of its leaders being killed by Free Syrian Army FSA so the group repeatedly tried to kill him , Al-Agha said.

All assassination’s attempts occurred in Ramadan, so Ibrahim changed his home to protect himself. One attempt occurred in front of his home by blast bomb that injured his brother. Another attempt occurred 2 years ago when a blast bomb was planted in his car, Al-Agha added.

Ibrahim expected his assassination a few days before his death through a post on his personal Facebook that read “Losing lives is uncompensated”

Sham network mourned its correspondent Ibrahim on its formal website indicating that he was one of the first media activists in Daraa. He worked with several media organizations and participated actively in covering Syrian revolution since its beginning. He documented humanitarian situations for different media outlets but he ended killed in Ramadan.

Ibrahim started his media work late of 2013 with SMART News Agency and then with the Syrian Media Committee in 2017 and then a correspondent to

Sham network before his killing. In addition, he worked freelance for a number of agencies, Anadolu and Reuters.

He was born in Daraa in 1992. He left behind a wife and a small girl. Ibrahim has a degree in English literature from university of Daraa.

Injury of media professional

Media activist Badr Talib was injured on Saturday, May 5, 2018 during a dispersal of demonstration in Aleppo's al-Bab.

“While filming the demonstration in front of police station in the city of al-Bab, a Turkish soldier opened fire in the air to disperse people but the bullets ran into a cement barrier and the fragments slightly injured me in the face. My health situation is stable now.” Talib told the Syrian Center for Journalistic Freedoms.

Talib works with Manasa Media Foundation. He also worked previously with Halab News network. He was born in Aleppo's al-Bab on March 8, 1992.

Arrest and detention of media professionals

(1) Media activist Ahmad Shafie Bilal was arrested on Wednesday, March 28, 2018 by Mehmet Fatih Sultan brigade, an armed opposition's brigade, in Aleppo's Afrin under the pretext of media work against the brigade. He was released on May 10, 2018.

While I was at one of Mehmet Fatih Sultan brigade's facilities in Sharan locality in Afrin, 2 members of the brigade wanted to go with me in a mission to enter Turkey and then come back Afrin to form a local council in the city but I was arrested by the brigade's members and put in a prison in Badali town under the pretext of posting against the brigade on Facebook, Bilal told the Syrian Center for Journalistic Freedoms.

“While I was at prison of the brigade, they cuffed my hands and blind my eyes and moved me to be investigated by a Turkish person in whom I could not identify. They, then, transferred me to Hur Kilis prison on April 1, 2018 and then on April 3, 2018 I was transferred to another prison to be brought in a court.” Bilal added.

Bilal also said that he was not physically tortured while being held in prison.

The court released him on May 10, 2018 but his media equipment (laptop, camera, tablet, mobile, and camera) were confiscated by the brigade and delivered to the Turkish authority, according to Bilal.

Bilal said that he previously was arrested twice by the autonomous administration’s Asayish in Afrin during the Turkish military operation Olive Branch. The first arrest was because he broadcasted a live video on Facebook filming bombs dropped on Afrin. The second arrest occurred in the period 5 – 9 March 2018 under the pretext of filming dug ditch around Afrin and cooperation with FSA.

Bilal works freelance for a number of media agencies. In addition, he volunteers to work in media department in Afrin University. He was born in January 18, 1994 in Afrin. He is single and studying economics in Afrin University.

(2) Media activist Abdulhafiz al-Hawalni was arrested on Thursday May 24, 2018 by Lebanese security forces at the camp of Lebanese town of Aarsal. His fate is still unknown so far.

Al-Hawlani works as a correspondent for Zaman al-Wasl. He was born in Homs’ al-Qusier.

Lebanese intelligence arrested correspondent of Zaman al-Wasl, Abdulhafiz al-Hawlani on Thursday, May 24 in Aarsal, Zaman al-Wasl reported.

Four members with civilian uniform entered the tent of al-Hawlani and identified themselves as intelligence members before they brought him to an unknown place, informed sources in Aarsal camps for Syrian refugees said.

An intelligence official called an official at the camps in Aarsal and inquire about al-Hawlani. Al-Hawlani media activity likely was the reason behind his arrest, the sources said.

Lebanese social media sites circulated the news of the arrest of al-Hawlani claiming that the arrest was because of his instigation against Lebanese army and state, the same sources added.

The most important priority of SJA is to protect media professionals. When a violation against media professionals is committed, we immediately start to inquire about that and verify reasons and circumstances as well as contacting with all concerned international organizations, Journalist Sakhr Idris, the general secretary of Syrian Journalists Association SJA said.

As for the colleague, Zaman al-Wasl correspondent, Abdulhafiz al-Hawlani , we informed concerned organizations and documented the case to push to release him. It is worth noting that reasons for arresting media professionals are usually not announced or clear and that makes detained media professionals as disappeared to worry about, Idris added.

Zaman al-Wasl asked the Lebanese government to immediatly relaese al-Hawlani and respect journalism work and media freedom. It also urged local and international rights and media organizations to work on releasing its correspondent in Aarsal.

Zaman al-Wasl asked the Lebanese government to immediately release al-Hawalani and respect journalistic work and media freedom. It also urged local and international media and rights organizations to work and help to release the correspondent in Aarsal.

Hitting media professionals and denying them from media coverage

Media activist Wael Adel and photographer Omar Hafiz were hit and subjected to cursing and denial of media work on Thursday May 15, 2018 by members of general security forces in Aleppo's Azaz. A group of media activists on May 16, 2018 organized a protesting condemning violations against media professionals committed by armed factions and security forces.

Adel told the Syrian Center for Journalistic Freedoms that members of security forces in Azaz denied them from filming while preparing reports about Ramadan under the pretext of not having permission from the local council indicating that the members detained them for 3 hours, hit and curse them too.

The members confiscated their equipment and IDs asking them to get the equipment back from al-Masara prison that is under the control of general security forces, Adel added

'We, Syrian media professionals in Aleppo's northern and eastern countryside stand in front of the same place that witnessed a humiliation to me and to the Syrian revolution by security group of more than 10 members even though we did nothing wrong.' Hafiz told the Center.

Adel works as a correspondent and a photographer for Syria TV. He was born in 1994 in Aleppo's Marie'. He is a member of Marie' Media Center and a member of Syrian Journalists Union that is formed recently in Aleppo countryside.

denying media professionals from media coverage

Media activist Anas Abu Adnan was denied from media coverage on Monday May 7, 2018 by unidentified armed gunmen while he was documenting humanitarian suffering of forcibly displaced from Homs.

Anas said in a statement to the Syrian Center for Journalistic Freedoms that while he was covering the first batch of forcibly displaced from al-

Rastan at 11:45, an armed group confiscated his camera and threw it on the ground cursing him under the pretext of filming women.

One of the gunmen put his weapon on the camera and wanted to shoot it so he hold it but the gunman took it back from him and took the card and battery and broke the lens cover and the card too.

Anas works as a manager and correspondent for al-Jisr TV in Homs since 2015. He has started his media activity since 2011 by documenting demonstrations and massacres committed by the Assad's regime in Homs. He was born in January 14, 1988 in Homs. Anas has 2 children. He has a degree in photography.

Release of media professionals

Hayet Tahrir al-Sham HTS released on Thursday May 24, 2018 media activist Ahmad al-Akhras. It had detained him in Idlib's Darkoush while he was preparing a report about the city on Saturday, April 28, 2018.

Al-Akhras works as photographer for SY24 agency. He was born in Idlib's Kafr Nabl. He has started his media activity since a year. It is worth mentioning that the Syrian Center for Journalistic Freedoms documented the arrest of al-Akhras in its report published in last April.

Description and recommendations of the Syrian Centre for Journalistic Freedoms

During wars, journalists and media workers are treated as civilians and therefore all parties involved in the conflict must ensure their safety.

According to the article 79 of the Additional Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Convention for the Protection of Civilian Persons in Armed Conflict states that civilian journalists performing their duties in areas of armed conflict must be respected and treated as civilians and protected from any form of deliberate attack, unless they do not act contrary to their status as civilians.

Under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (articles 7 and 8) crimes against civilians and objects, including media headquarters, are considered war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The UN Security Council Resolution 1738 of 2006 included the following:

- Equating the safety and security of journalists, media and aid workers in areas of armed conflict for protection of civilians there.
- Condemning deliberate attacks against journalists, media professionals and any associated personnel during armed conflicts.
- Considering journalists and independent reporters as civilians to be respected and treated
- Considering media installations and equipment as civilian objects that may not be the target of any attacks or reprisals.

Therefore, the actions of the various parties committing violations against journalists and media professionals in Syria from killing, enforced disappearance, assault on media institutions and other violations amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity

As such the Syrian Center for Journalistic Freedoms of the Syrian Journalists' Association call all parties to respect journalistic freedom, ensure the safety of media professionals and hold those responsible for violations accountable. It calls upon all the actors in Syria and the international parties concerned to enforce international laws specially for the protection and defense of media professionals, journalistic freedoms, and the right to communicate information in Syria.

The center also recommends that all parties to the conflict respect the text of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states: **"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference, to receive and impart information and ideas using any medium and without limits and geographical limitations"**

The Syrian Journalists Association