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Various Violations against Media Activists in Northern and Southern Syria during April and May 2018

A Flash report highlighting a number of assassinations, abductions, arrests and abuses against media activists in northern and southern Syria

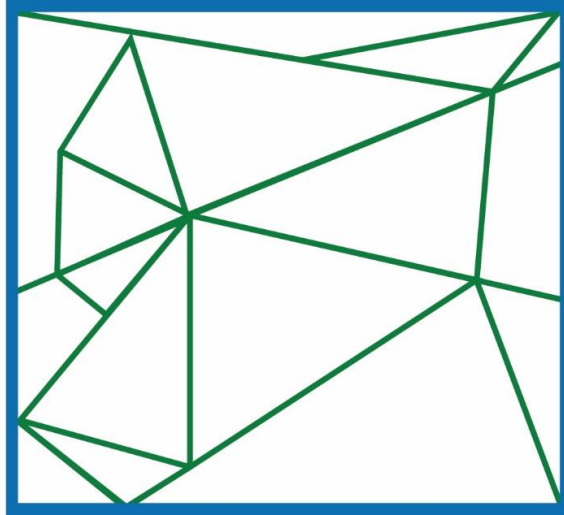
About the organization (STJ)

[Syrians for Truth and Justice \(STJ\)](#) is an independent, nongovernmental organization whose members include Syrian human rights defenders, advocates and academics of different backgrounds and nationalities.

The initiative strives for SYRIA, where all Syrian citizens (males and females) have dignity, equality, justice and equal human rights.

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Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



Various Violations against Media Activists in Northern and Southern Syria during April and May 2018

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Preface

Violations against media men and journalists in northern and southern Syria increased significantly during April and May 2018, where on Thursday May 17, 2018, unidentified assailants assassinated the media activist Ibrahim al-Manjar, by shooting him near his home in [Saida](#) town, in Daraa eastern countryside, under the control of the Syrian armed opposition. Many eyewitnesses told STJ that "ISIL" is likely to be behind that assassination.

On May 17, 2018, "Alaa al-Abdullah", director of the Media Institute at Idlib University, was arrested by members of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham/HTS¹ in Idlib city, against the backdrop of his criticism of the Media Institute of the Salvation Government² and his remarks about its lack of qualified teachers. Abdullah was released on May 20, 2018, after 72 hours in detention, according to several testimonies obtained by STJ.

HTS had previously detained the media activist Ahmed al-Akhras on April 28, 2018, along with his colleague, the photographer Rami Ruslan, while they were filming a documentary in [Darkush](#) town, located in the western countryside of Idlib. They have been arrested on the pretext of not having a permission to photograph, the photographer "Rami Ruslan" was released after one day of his detention, while al-Akhras was released on May 24, 2018, after a 25-day detention, According to STJ field researcher. Al-Akhras had vowed not to photograph anywhere in Idlib, except with an official permission from HTS, according to several sources.

¹ On January 28, 2017, several Jihadi factions in northern Syria announced the merger under the name of "Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham/HTS" They were; Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly Al-Nusra Front), The Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement, Liwa al-Haqq, Jabhat Ansar al-Din, Jaysh al-Sunna and Ansar al-Sham. However, The Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement declared its secession from HTS against the background of the recent clashes between the latter and Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya in northern Syria on 15 July 2017.

² On September 17, 2017, the Syrian General Conference was held in Idlib province, which reached the formation of a "Founding Council / Founding Body" to name a new Prime Minister, resulting in a final statement to form what they called the "Salvation Government" to administrate the "Liberated areas" in northern Syria. The "Salvation Government" was actually formed on November 2, 2017, as it announced the designation of its ministers in its founding conference, which was chaired by "Muhammad Al-Sheikh", who said that the formation of this Government came after the launch of an initiative to form a civil administration by a group of academics, operators and bodies in Idlib. This Government was charged with the subordination to HTS/ (formerly Al-Nusra Front), on the background of its hire to some HTS agents to apply a number of its decisions.



According to STJ field researcher in Daraa, media activists are the first victims of the ongoing conflicts between the various military forces in Daraa. Pursuing truth often endangers the life of the media activist/journalist, where they are exposed to serious threats that start with arrest and end with assassination. STJ documented abuses by all parties against media activists, such as [the assassination of the activist "Osama al-Zoubi", who was working for the Syrian Media Agency, by an explosive device](#) on a road near the positions of the Syrian regular forces, which is believed to be responsible for the explosion of several explosive devices that led to the death of scores in various places of Daraa.

Reporting some of the excesses committed by The Youth of Sunna Forces, affiliated to the Syrian armed opposition, has led to the arrest of Alaan TV correspondent "Muhammad al-Ghazawi" in one of this opposing faction's prisons, where he was offended. STJ prepared a [detailed report](#) on this incident. Clear evidence indicates that ISIL is the one behind the assassination of the media activist Ibrahim al-Manjar after his long march towards documenting the violations committed by this organization against civilians in the western countryside of Daraa.

For his part, STJ field researcher in Idlib Province, said that HTS continued to stifle journalists and media activists in northern Syria, despite its "pledging to facilitate" the mission of the media men in the area. Noting that the arrest of the media activist Ahmed al-Akhras led many media activists in the province to take all the safety measures for fear of the arbitrary arrest, which has prevailed lately.

First: The assassination of the media activist Ibrahim al-Manjar in Daraa Province

The media activist Ibrahim al-Manjar descended from Tell Shihab village, west of Daraa, born in 1992, and married with a three-year-old girl. He has worked since 2011 in several media agencies operating in southern Syria, including Shaam News Network and Smart News Agency, he worked also as a photographer in "Alaan TV" and "al-Jisr TV" and as a reporter for "SY24" Agency. In 2017, he moved to live in Saida after being subjected to three assassination attempts



over two years in Tell Shihab village, where cells of Khalid ibn al-Walid Army, affiliated to ISIL, are active. In this regard, "Ja'afar Abu al-Agha", a close friend of al-Manjar, spoke to STJ, saying:

" Ibrahim al-Manjar was subjected to three assassination attempts during 2015 and 2016, two of which occurred during Ramadan. The three assassination attempts were by explosive devices, the first of which targeted his motorcycle when he was near Dara'a Al-Balad District, and the second targeted his car in Tell Shihab village, while the third was thrown near his home, resulting in the injury of his brother. That's why he decided to move to Saida, as he thought that it would be a safer place, far from the cells of Khalid ibn al-Walid Army, which controls the Hawd al-Yarmouk near Tell Shihab village."

According to al-Agha, al-Manjar had always told his friends just before his assassination, that ISIL was behind assassination attempts, as it accused him of being a "spy and agent" of the Syrian armed opposition factions. He also noted that al-Manjar felt that he was being watched, especially after the murder of Salah al-Buqairat in Tell Shihab on March 28, 2017, pointing out that " Salah "is an expert in planting explosive devices and controlling them remotely, and was known of his subordination to ISIL, among the people of the area, he was also the leader of many sleeper cells. al-Manjar feared he would be accused of killing Salah.

Second: Arrests of media men and journalists in Idlib by HTS

Violations against journalists and media men in northern Syria were several, as on Thursday, May 17, 2018, the director of the Media Institute at Idlib University, "Alaa al-Abdullah", kidnapped by an unidentified party in Idlib city, to be found later that the security battalion of HTS was the one behind the incident. al-Abdullah descended from Kafr Nabl town, born in 1981 and he is married with children. Muhammad al-Yaseen, alias, a media activist from Idlib, said in this connection:

"At about 11:00 a.m., an armed group riding pickup vehicles and a van raided the place where Alaa al-Abdullah was, near Idlib University, and took him immediately into a car, without knowing to which party they belong, but it is well known that no military faction dare



carry out such operations without coordinating with the HTS security battalion, since it controls the city, and surrounds it with checkpoints.”

Alaa al-Abdullah is one of the best teachers at the university's Media Institute, and apparently he was been arrested for the statements he made earlier at Idlib Media Center, which reported that the Media Institute lacked sufficient expertise and qualified teachers, knowing that the institute was the only one of its kind in the region that trains and teaches students media, and it follows the Salvation Government, which in turn follows HTS. Al-Abdullah remained in detention for approximately 72 hours in one of HTS’ detention centers, before being released on May 20, 2018.

Al-Yaseen said that he met Alaa al-Abdullah after being released, but the latter did not disclose the reason for his arrest or whether he was being investigated, it is probable that HTS has forced him to vow to never talk about the incident as long as he is in Idlib, and commented:

"We live in a very harsh conditions here in Idlib, because HTS stranglehold us, we all know the consequences of expressing oneself under the rule of a military faction which does not know what freedom of expression and opinion means".

STJ obtained a further testimony, from a staff member of the Idlib Media Center, who said that prior to the arrest of the director of the Institute, Alaa al-Abdullah, the center prepared a photo report highlighting the condition of the Media Institute at Idlib University, where they had interviewed some teachers and student in addition to the Director of the Institute who spoke about some teachers’ lack of experience, noting that on the background of this report a number of institute students interviewed in the class were threatened with arrest where the director of the Institute was arrested indeed, so in order to avoid any hostility or problems, this report was deleted, pointing that some of the persons concerned at the Institute had prompted some of the institute's students to [demonstrate](#) and contradicted the Idlib Media Center, requesting it to issue an apology.



Image shows the media activist Ahmed al-Akhras, prior to his arrest by members of HTS in Darkush town, Idlib western countryside, on April 29, 2018. Photo credit: activists from Darkush.

HTS has not only arrested the director of the Media Institute at Idlib University, where on April 29, 2018, the media activist, "Ahmed al-Akhras" who was born in Darkush town in (1991), was also arrested by agents of HTS, on charges of filming in Darkush, Idlib western countryside, without prior authorization. Al-Akhras works as a reporter at the "SY24" Agency in northern Syria and was arrested together with his colleague the photographer, "Rami al-Ruslan", who was released the following day. In this regard, an activist from Darkush spoke to STJ saying:

"On 29 April 2018, I was in Darkush when agents of HTS arrested Ahmed al-Akhras while he was filming a documentary inside the town, arguing that he did not have permission to photograph. In more detail, two pickup vehicles loaded with HTS agents stormed the film set and arrested al-Akhras without asking any question. Al-Akhras is still in the prisons of HTS as of the moment, despite the requests of all media professionals and journalists in Idlib Province to release him. It has been 20 days since al-Akhras was arrested, which prompted The Revolutionary Forces of Syria media office in Idlib Province to issue a statement demanding clarifications concerning the arrest of al-Akhras and the release of him."



Image shows the statement issued by the Free Media Union in Idlib Province on May 7, 2018 on the incident of the arrest of the media activist Ahmed al-Akhras by agents of HTS. Photo credit:

[Revolutionary Forces of Syria media office.](#)

Wael Adel, Syria TV correspondent, , and his cameraman, Omar Hafez, were also arrested and assaulted by a group of General Security agents affiliated to Syrian armed opposition in Azaz, Aleppo countryside, on May 15, 2018 on the pretext that they did not have a license to photograph a report, [as stated in a report on the incident published by Syria TV on its official website](#), which says that:

"The patrol agents assaulted the reporter Omar Hafez, and arrested them after hurling insults at them, and confiscating their equipment and identity cards. They were released after three hours, after being asked to go to the "al-Maasarah" department, which is "The General Security Prison."