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Kurdish citizen journalist kidnapped and murdered in Syria

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ecoi.net summary: Derbassiyeh: Journalist Jawan Mohamed Qatna was abducted by 4 hooded men from his home; his body, which showed signs of torture, was found 3 hours later in a nearby village [ID 212951]**Countries:**

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Kurdish citizen journalist kidnapped and murdered in Syria

Reporters Without Borders has learned with dismay of the murder two days ago of the citizen journalist Jawan Mohamed Qatna.

"The organization strongly condemns this murder. Activists and journalists who strive to keep the international community informed about the demonstrations across the country and the abuses by the authorities are the main victims of the violence of the past year," Reporters Without Borders said.

"Kidnapping, torture and murder have become everyday practices, particularly by forces linked to the government. The UN special representative for Syria, Kofi Annan, must acknowledge these abuses in his plan to end the violence and conduct an investigation as soon as he is able."

Qatna, an amateur photographer, was abducted by four hooded men from his home in the town of Derbassiyeh, north of the eastern city of Al-Hassakeh, at 8 pm two days ago. His body, which showed signs of torture, was found three hours later in a nearby village. The brutality of his treatment can be seen in a video posted on YouTube.

Uncertainty surrounds the identities of his killers. Some sources blame the pro-Assad Shabiha militia while others are still unsure. Whoever plotted and carried out his murder, the press freedom organization condemns this killing and hopes investigators will find the perpetrators who will then be tried and punished.

Qatna, 22, was active in the Kurdish youth movement and acted as a photographer for the Free Derbassiyeh Coordination Committee. He regularly covered demonstrations in the mainly Kurdish region and supplied photographs to various media organizations. Reporters Without Borders expresses its sincere condolences to his family and friends.

He was buried yesterday in his birthplace of Tel Kadish near Derbassiyeh. Several citizen journalists and four professional journalists have been killed since the start of the year, including two Frenchmen, reporter Gilles Jacquier and photographer Rémi Ochlik, as well as American war correspondent Marie Colvin and Syrian journalist Shoukri Ahmed Ratib Abu Bourghoul.

Citizens and activists have taken over the baton from professional journalists unable to enter Syria or who are prevented from carrying out their work. They are playing an essential role in gathering and distributing information. Reporters Without Borders has previously reported the arrest of many of them.

The lawyer and blogger Rudy Othman was among the new detainees. He was arrested on Hamra Street in Damascus on 15 March for the third time since the start of the protests. The blogger and activist Jamal Al-Omas was arrested at the Lebanese border the same day as he returned from Beirut.

The blogger Mohamed Abu Hajar was arrested in the Mediterranean-coast city of Tartus on 14 March because of what he has been writing in his blog "Mazaj."

Ahmed Salal, a journalist who was arrested on 12 February, was meanwhile released yesterday.

As already reported, the 12 young people who were arrested on the evening of 7 March in the restaurant Ninjar, in the Damascus neighbourhood of Bab Sharqi, included Yara Michael Shamas, 20, an information technology specialist who is the daughter of Michael Shamas, a human rights lawyer active on Facebook, Jihad Jamal, a blogger known by the name of 'Milan', who had been released on 29 December after two and a half months in detention, and Etab Labbad, a 20-year-old journalism student who has worked with various newspapers and websites such as Kassioun and Baladna.

The authorities are still holding eight of the 16 people who were arrested during a 16 February raid on the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression. They are Mazen Darwish (the head of the centre), Hussein Gharir, Hani Zitani, Joan Fersso, Bassam Al-Ahmed, Mansour Al-Omari, Abdel Rahman Hamada and Ayham Ghazzoul. Reporters Without Borders reiterates its call for their release. The latest member of the original 16 to be freed was Shady Yazbek, on 12 March.

There is still no news of two Turkish journalists – Adem Özköse, a reporter for the magazine Gerçek Hayat and the daily Milat, and cameraman Hamit Coşkun – who were abducted by Shabiha militiamen near the northwestern city of Idlib on 10 March and then handed over to members of the Syrian intelligence services.

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