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Middle East/North Africa - Syria

News providers abducted, murdered, media premises destroyed as vice closes on Aleppo

20 November 2013

As the regular army intensifies its attacks on Aleppo, it is targeting Syrian media and news providers. A citizen-journalist was shot dead by an army sniper yesterday and two news media were destroyed by army shelling last weekend.

Yesterday's [victim](#) was **Mohamed Ahmed Taysir Bellou** (also known as **Mohamed Al-Andani**), who was the editor of [Al-Shahba TV](#), a reporter for the [Shahba Press agency](#) and the Ahrar Souria brigade's media bureau chief. An army sniper shot him in the neck as he was covering [fighting](#) near intelligence department offices in the Aleppo district of Lairmoon.

The two news media whose premises were bombed by the regular army within the space of 48 hours were *Aleppo News Network* (or *Halap News Network – HNN*) and the *Aleppo Media Centre*.

HNN's offices in Nafiza (in the Sheikh Najjar industrial zone north of Aleppo) were badly damaged when targeted by the regular army at around midday on 17 November. No one was injured but activists said they had intercepted army communications saying *HNN* had to be targeted "because these information activist dogs are in the building."

Missiles with high-energy explosives were fired at the *Aleppo Media Centre* in the district of Al-Miyasar on 16 November, destroying the centre and injuring the four people who were inside at the time. They included **Fadi Al-Halabi** and **Mohamed Tayed** (both *AMC* employees) and **Hassan Qattan**, an information activist. Halabi told Reporters Without Borders that regime supporters had threatened him on Facebook.

Meanwhile in Damascus, the independent journalist **Omar Al-Shaar** [was kidnapped](#) from his home in the southwestern suburb of Jaramana on 11 November by government intelligence officials, who took his computer and the computer of his wife, a lawyer. Shaar is a professional journalist who has edited the English-language section of the independent [DP-Press News](#) website since 2011.

At the same time, Reporters Without Borders has noted a marked increase in abductions of Syrian news providers by armed groups in and near the city of Aleppo since the start of November. At least five Syrian citizen-journalists have been kidnapped in the past three weeks.

"The increased pace of abductions is extremely disturbing," said Reporters Without Borders, which published a report entitled ["Journalism in Syria, impossible job?"](#) on 6 November. The headquarters of two news media were also destroyed by regular army bombardments last weekend.

More than 20 Syrian news providers are currently held hostage while a total of 16 foreign journalists are detained, held hostage or missing.

The latest kidnap victim was the citizen-journalist **Ahmed Bremono**, who [was abducted](#) by gunmen in the Aleppo district of Zebdiya on 16 November.

Two days before that, around 30 gunmen [stormed](#) into the office of the *Zaman Al-Wasl* news website in Aleppo on the evening of 14 November looking for one of its reporters, **Ra'fat Al-Rifaei**, and seized some of his equipment when they failed to find him.

Rifaei, who has been in hiding ever since, told the site he thought their intrusion was prompted by articles he had written. He added that he had received many threats, especially

since the citizen-journalist **Abdul Wahhab Al-Mulla**'s abduction the previous week.

Five men [kidnapped Jomaa Musa](#), also known as the "Joyful Media Activist," from his home in the Aleppo district of Hanano on 12 November

Abdul Wahab Al-Mulla, a citizen-journalist who is one of the founders of the *Aleppo News Network* and the Aleppo Reporters Union, was kidnapped by gunmen from his home in the Aleppo district of Hanano on 7 November.

A critic of both the Assad regime and armed opposition groups, he hosts a programme called "[3-Star Revolution](#)" on the "*Halab Al-Youm*" (Aleppo Today) TV station, in which he has repeatedly criticized abuses by Islamist groups.

Muayyad Sallum, a reporter for *Orient TV*, [was abducted](#) in Tareeq Castello, on the outskirts of Aleppo, on 1 November.

Ziad Homs, a [photographer](#) based in the Damascus suburb of Duma who works for *Basma* and the magazine *Henta*, was [kidnapped](#) on 28 October at a checkpoint north of Aleppo controlled by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) as he was returning from Turkey.

Al-Arabiya TV correspondent **Mohamed Saeed Al-Khatib** was fatally shot outside his home in the Aleppo district of Hraitan on 29 October by three gunmen, who initially tried to kidnap him. He was shot three times, including one shot to the head.

It seems that Khatib, who used to work for *Orient TV*, was murdered because of the views he expressed publicly about the abduction of three former *Orient TV* colleagues – **Obaida Batal**, **Hussam** and **Aboud** – outside his home on 25 July. He had known ever since that he was under threat.

Syrian news providers are fleeing the country in large numbers because of the threat from the ISIS. More than ten have sought refuge in Turkey since the start of the month. Many of those still in Syria have stopped working for fear of ISIS reprisals.

The only media that the ISIS tolerates are those that publish or broadcast the information or communiqués approved by their emirs. In its view, all other media must be silenced and their employees must be killed.

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