

**Annual Report of the Freedoms Center
Syrian Kurdish Journalists Network (SKJN)
2025: A Year of Searching for Forcibly Disappeared Journalists**

Introduction:

In light of the political transformations, escalating conflicts, and armed confrontations taking place around the world, journalists remain among the groups most exposed to danger, as witnesses in conveying the truth, and as defenders, through their writing, of the free voices of communities affected by these conflicts, and in exposing facts to local and international public opinion, especially when their professional and ethical role is at the heart of conflict, or under the pressure of repressive regimes that confiscate freedom of opinion and expression, and armed groups that target any voice that undermines their plans, a reality that was confirmed by *Reporters Without Borders* in its annual report for 2025, which stated that the issue of missing and hostage journalists represents one of the most serious forms of targeted violence against press freedom and freedom of opinion and expression, and not merely a collateral outcome of wars and conflicts, as Syria ranks last on the World Press Freedom Index.

From here, the Syrian Kurdish Journalists Network has continued, since its establishment and up to the present day, its work in monitoring and documenting violations committed against journalists and media workers in Syria, as well as preparing annual reports based on approved professional and legal standards, and in line with international charters and conventions related to press freedom and the protection of journalists, through its Freedoms Center affiliated with the Network's Monitoring and Documentation Office, in addition to issuing condemnation and solidarity statements regarding any violation case within the geographical area of its work, or any case that requires documentation outside the scope of its geographical work within Syria as a whole. These reports aim to shed light on the reality of press and media freedom in Syria, and on the violations committed against journalists, including arrest, enforced disappearance, or killing, as well as less severe cases that nonetheless must be documented in accordance with international laws and standards, in order to alert the international community, and concerned organizations defending and protecting journalists, to the dangers of the continued culture of impunity, and to the necessity of taking practical measures to ensure the protection of journalists and their right to work safely and independently, away from any agendas that conflict with their professional work.

Who We Are:

The Violations Monitoring and Documentation Office is affiliated with the Syrian Kurdish Journalists Network, which constitutes an independent media organizational framework, aimed at defending press freedoms in the areas of its presence, regardless of gender, sect, or ethnicity, or the background of the institutions they work for or the perpetrating party, and it brings together within its ranks Syrian Kurdish media professionals, as well as journalists from other components, inside and outside Syria.

The Network was established on 10/3/2012, initially under the name "Union of Syrian Kurdish Journalists," after a group of Kurdish academics, graduates of the Faculty of Media at Damascus University, concluded the necessity of advancing the Kurdish media landscape and addressing the Syrian reality in general, and the Kurdish reality in particular, with neutrality and professionalism, away from any political or partisan bias, and the name was changed from "Union" to "Network" based on the resolutions of the fourth conference held on 8 August 2020, with the approval of the majority of

members, accordingly, the Network relies in the preparation of its annual report on its members distributed across various regions, through specific criteria in accordance with international laws and norms related to the protection of journalists, concerning violations committed by the various parties to the conflict in Syria, as well as other parties and actors outside the country, in addition to news and journalistic reports published by local media outlets at the moment the violation occurs, and by monitoring and documentation centers, after analysing and verifying them with full professionalism and transparency, and resorting to testimonies provided by the journalist subjected to the violation, if available, or if it is possible to reach them.

Press Freedom in Syria:

Through careful monitoring of the various forms of violations committed against journalists in different regions, what we have documented does not differ from what some local and international committees and organizations have observed regarding arbitrary arrests by security forces and rogue armed militias, and the levying of accusations that contradict the truth in cooperation with political or military actors, and detention without any legal justification or independent access to justice. In recent months, for example, journalists, including those working in monitoring and documenting violations, have been arrested by local forces affiliated with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northeastern Syria under the pretext of non-transparent security charges, or as a result of filing false reports against them, which indicates that fundamental threats to press freedom have not decreased under the new regime, but rather that their forms have evolved.

This is reflected in Syria's ranking in the 2025 report, 177th out of 180 countries, according to the World Press Freedom Index, placing it among the lowest-ranking countries in press freedom globally, and therefore the most dangerous for the work environment. As this ranking confirms that the spaces for journalistic work in Syria are extremely difficult in terms of press freedom, freedom of opinion and expression, the existence of independent media that do not submit to any pressures, and the lack of professional safety for journalists, and the importance of the index and its evaluation lies in the fact that it is based on several factors: including the political context, the legal framework, economic pressures, the social context, and the level of safety for journalists, all of which reflect the major challenges facing press freedom in Syria.

Violations Committed Against Journalists:

The past year witnessed significant political and security transformations on the Syrian scene, represented by the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime and the formation of a new government. However, these transformations did not positively reflect on the reality of press freedom, as new violations were recorded and conflicts reemerged in several areas of the country, contributing to the continuation of the risks faced by journalists while performing their work. In this context, the Syrian Kurdish Journalists Network continued its efforts in monitoring and documenting violations against journalists in northeastern Syria, that is, the areas that were under the control of the Democratic Self-Administration, in addition to monitoring the state of freedoms in various Syrian regions according to the distribution of control, relying on a precise documentation methodology aimed at providing a comprehensive and objective picture of the media freedom situation over a full year, and the cases that targeted journalists during their coverage of clashes in areas such as Aleppo, As-Suwayda, the Coast, and Damascus, where cases of arbitrary arrest and physical assaults carried out by factions affiliated with the government were

recorded, reflecting the fragility of the security environment for journalistic work. And the following were observed:

- 1- On 23 March 2025, the correspondent of the Kurdish channel “Ronahi”, Ziwer Sheikho, was arrested in the Syrian Coast by members of the security forces affiliated with the Syrian Interim Government, and he was released after several hours, but his mobile device was confiscated.
- 2- On 31 March 2025, factions affiliated with the Syrian Interim Government arrested our colleague Akram Saleh, correspondent for “**Channel 8**”, and the cameraman Joudi Haj Ali, during their field coverage of ongoing clashes in the Sahnaya area in rural Damascus, and they were released the following day, on 1 May 2025.
- 3- On Friday, 27 June 2025, the “General Security” forces affiliated with the Syrian Interim Government arrested journalist Hassan Zaza in the capital, Damascus, and took him to an unknown location, without disclosing the reasons behind the arrest, and he was released on 3 July 2025.
- 4- On 24 July 2025, correspondent Solin Muhammad Amin, who was working for the “**Rudaw**” media network, was subjected to verbal and physical assault while covering events in As-Suwayda by some armed individuals.
- 5- On 11 September 2025, the house of journalist Ahmad Sheikho in the city of Afrin was looted by factions affiliated with the Syrian Interim Government.
- 6- During November 2025, a group of Kurdish journalists and activists were subjected to an incitement campaign on social media platforms, in addition to having their names brought into some demonstrations that took place in the context of the Syrian conflict and its repercussions, including colleagues Lewend Hussein, Ivan Hasib, and Naz Al-Sayed, accompanied by the dissemination of inciting and hate speech against them with the aim of damaging their reputation, and morally targeting them in a manner that exposes them to real risks to their lives and personal safety.

Violations in the Areas of the Democratic Self-Administration:

Despite the relative stability of the security situation in the areas of the Democratic Self-Administration compared to other regions in Syria, particularly those that witnessed tensions and prevented journalists from entering them for fear of documenting violations committed against civilians, the Monitoring and Documentation Office of the Network documented a number of cases of arrest and detention of journalists, in addition to security summonses and direct and indirect pressures, on the basis of media coverage considered “contrary to the official discourse” or critical of the performance of security and administrative institutions.

- 7- On the night of 22-23 April 2025, security authorities affiliated with the local administration in the Democratic Self-Administration arrested journalist Jomaa Akash, correspondent for Al Arabiya and Al Hadath networks, and he was released on 25 April 2025.
- 8- On Wednesday, 2 July 2025, the “Internal Security” forces of the Self-Administration in northern and eastern Syria detained journalist Raman Abdulsalam Haso after summoning him to one of the security centers in the city of Amuda, and he was released the following day, 3 July 2025.
- 9- Journalist Hiba Kosa was arrested in Raqqa on 4 July 2025 by the Syrian Democratic Forces without being formally charged, and she was released on 31 July 2025.

- 10- After a full month of detention, journalist Firas Al-Burjas, who was arrested from his home in Raqqa on 8 December 2025 by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Was released on 26 January 2026.
- 11- The Media Department of the Self-Administration refused to issue a work permit for journalist Sangar Khaleel, originally from Iraqi Kurdistan, for the second consecutive time, without providing reasons for the refusal.
- 12- Repressive actions also extended beyond the borders, as the threats were not limited to journalists by the Syrian government and de facto authorities alone, but also involved regional international actors and cross-border forces, targeting press crews with drones. for example, on 22 January 2025, a group of journalists was attacked by a Turkish drone near the Tishrin Dam in rural Kobani, northern Syria, causing multiple injuries to the body, including:
 - Layla Abdi, Ronahi network
 - Jakdar Haj Mahmoud, Sterk network
 - Muhannad Ibrahim, KNN network
 - Muhammad Badli, Ronahi network
 - Ali Sharnakhi, Ronahi network

Ongoing Violence Against Journalists:

A year after the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime, a number of journalists who were detained or kidnapped under his rule or by the Islamic State (ISIS) have still not been found, according to Reporters Without Borders, there are 37 journalists still listed as missing in Syria, noting that many of them were hostages of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or prisoners of Bashar al-Assad's forces, yet the fate of these individuals remains unknown despite the change of the ruling regime in the country, however, the issue of journalists is not limited to or confined to any single country, but generally affects most countries around the world that have witnessed internal conflict and war, as statistics indicate that there are 135 missing journalists in 37 countries worldwide, and notably, some of them have been missing for more than thirty years, which indicates that the phenomenon of enforced disappearance is not a recent or temporary issue, but rather a continuous and deeply rooted situation within complex political and security contexts. Syria alone accounts for 37 of these missing journalists, that is, more than a quarter of the global total of disappearance cases, making it the country with the highest number of missing journalists in the world to this day, despite the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime at the end of 2024 and the opening of all prisons and detention centers.

Within the Syrian context as well, cases of enforced disappearance and detention inside Syria have been documented at the hands of armed factions and in areas under the control of groups operating outside the framework of the state, despite the collapse of the security state built by the two Assads (the father and the son), as indicated by some international reports stating that groups operating under the banner of "Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham" continue to detain a number of journalists without any clear information regarding their fate, or a legal framework for their release, and these figures reveal multiple forms of ongoing violence against journalists, such as arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearance, detention and hostage-taking by armed groups, and the absence of judicial mechanisms or transparency to uncover the truth or hold those responsible accountable. And despite the structural transformations that have occurred in the Syrian scene following the end of Assad's rule, the impact of this transition remains incomplete in terms of justice and accountability, while the families of missing journalists continue to await answers about the fate of those who disappeared, and the danger remains present for those

working in the field, particularly in areas witnessing overlapping security and political tensions such as northeastern Syria.

2025: A Year of Searching for Forcibly Disappeared Journalists:

The Syrian Kurdish Journalists Network considered 2025 a dedicated year for defending forcibly disappeared journalists, raising its voice loudly to demand the disclosure of the fate of correspondents, journalists, and photojournalists who were forcibly disappeared in Syria, foremost among them Farhad Hamo and Hussein Eiso, as a humanitarian cry stating, "Return the names to their families, return the truth to its owners," as expressed by colleague Khawla Chabbeh, advisor on freedom of expression and journalist safety, during her participation in the solidarity campaign carried out by the Network, through a project that extended over several months and included a series of dialogue sessions, articles, and solidarity messages, both written and video-recorded, to shed broader light on this file, which represents the most brutal weapon in situations of instability that Syria has experienced for more than a decade, targeting the truth and every free voice, and in which many colleagues from Syria and several Arab countries participated, along with active advocates from international organizations such as Reporters Without Borders and Amnesty International, affirming that the longer the absence lasts, the longer the pain of families who await any glimmer of hope about their loved ones, despite the delay of the sought-after justice, through the achievement of transitional justice whose core lies in the right to know the truth about everything related to the forcibly disappeared, and to hold accountable every individual or entity responsible for their disappearance, as a necessity to do justice to those who are gone and to those who continue to wait!

All participants in the solidarity campaign affirmed that the truth can only be revealed through the formation of specialized and independent committees that operate with full transparency, and without any pressures or side influences from forces controlling the ground, involving the families of victims and representing all components within Syria without exception, and emphasizing that uncovering the truth in the files of the enforced disappearance of journalists in Syria is essential for the profession of the fourth estate to remain true to its role in defending every rights holder, and that its voice will not be in vain, and consequently activating Syrian laws, including general laws and the Media Law, and calling for their reform in a way that criminalizes enforced disappearance and guarantees the independence of courts and the judiciary, in addition to supporting the efforts of local human rights organizations in monitoring and documenting violations committed by various parties, and filing lawsuits whenever safe conditions are available, as one of the tools to ensure the right to accountability and prevent impunity, especially since Syria is bound under customary international law and other agreements, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to prohibit enforced disappearance and to prosecute its perpetrators.

Rights That Do Not Lapse with Time:

Over the past seven years, the Network has documented in its annual reports 50 cases of seizure of the homes and properties of journalists in the areas of Afrin, Serekaniye/Ras al-Ain, Girê Spî/Tal Abyad, and Tel Tamer, by the Turkish forces occupying those areas along with the Syrian factions loyal to them, as ongoing violations committed by those parties. And despite the fall of the Syrian regime and the liberation of the cities and towns considered the hometowns of these displaced persons, they have not returned to them, and accordingly, those properties and homes have not been returned to their owners, and according to testimonies from some residents, the very few who returned to their cities caused

damage to the properties before leaving, and looted them without any compensation to their rightful owners, whether civilians or the families of journalists.

All that has taken place over the past years has shown no regard for the laws of war, which explicitly prohibit looting or the forcible seizure of private property for personal use, and in fact classify such acts among the rules that consider them war crimes when the area has witnessed reciprocal clashes, which is what occurred repeatedly, as the laws and procedures in this context are clear and specific and do not permit fighters to seize property for personal use, even to house their families, and accordingly, the intentions of the current authorities have not, up to the time of writing this report, moved toward any solutions that include justice and redress for those affected, or toward returning the seized homes in the three cities of Afrin, Serekaniye/Ras al-Ain, and Tal Abyad to their original owners, and this issue constitutes an important part of the United Nations “Pinheiro Principles,” which reflect widely applicable international law regarding housing and property restitution in the context of the return of refugees and displaced persons, and stipulate that “all refugees and displaced persons have the right to have restored to them any housing and/or land of which they were arbitrarily or unlawfully deprived”. And we are certain that rights do not lapse with the passage of time, however, we decided this year not to publish the previous tables, due to the necessity of updating them in accordance with new data, and consequently due to the movement and relocation of more than one colleague from one area to another, or from one media outlet to another.

Conclusion:

The documented information gathered over 14 years of the Syrian conflict has revealed a persistent pattern of violations committed against journalists and media workers, encompassing all forms of violations, including killing, arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, physical assaults, restrictions on journalistic work, and confiscation of journalistic equipment, within a context that restricts the exercise of press freedom and freedom of opinion and expression. And many cases indicate the absence of basic legal guarantees and non-compliance with fair trial standards, in addition to the use of evidence lacking credibility or legal legitimacy, which has contributed to the continued culture of impunity and the ineffectiveness of national accountability mechanisms in investigating these violations or holding those responsible accountable, therefore it is necessary to reaffirm the recommendations emphasizing the urgent need to adopt independent and impartial international mechanisms concerned with collecting, consolidating, preserving, and analysing evidence, preparing comprehensive legal case files, and ensuring regular communication with victims and their families

Accordingly, the Syrian Kurdish Journalists Network, through all of its annual reports, reiterates the obligations of states under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the necessity of respecting the rules of international humanitarian law, particularly with regard to the protection of journalists who carry out dangerous journalistic missions in areas of conflict and armed violence, as civilians, in accordance with relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the Human Rights Council. And it also stresses the importance of taking into account the specific risks faced by women journalists, and adopting a gender-sensitive approach in measures related to the safety of media workers, because ensuring their safety, and protecting free journalism and independent media, are also among the key recommendations, as they constitute an essential element in strengthening the rule of law, protecting human rights, and supporting societies toward the desired democratic transition

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