

2nd Nov

**End Impunity
Protect Journalists**



GCHR

مركز الخليج لحقوق الإنسان

**انهاء الافلات من العقاب
لحماية الصحفيين**

No to Impunity

A report published by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights
To mark the International Day to End Impunity

02 November 2020

www.gc4hr.org



GCHR

مركز الخليج لحقوق الإنسان



The Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) is an independent, non-profit NGO that provides support and protection to human rights defenders (HRDs) in order to promote human rights, including but not limited to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. GCHR is based in Lebanon and documents the environment for HRDs in the Gulf region and neighbouring countries, specifically Bahrain, Kuwait, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. GCHR was founded in 2011.

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No to Impunity

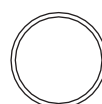
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Murders & other serious violations continue against MENA journalists

Journalists in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region continue to face grave violations of their civil and human rights, including murder by governments or armed groups, usually with total impunity. Countries such as Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen continue to be classified among the most dangerous places for journalists.

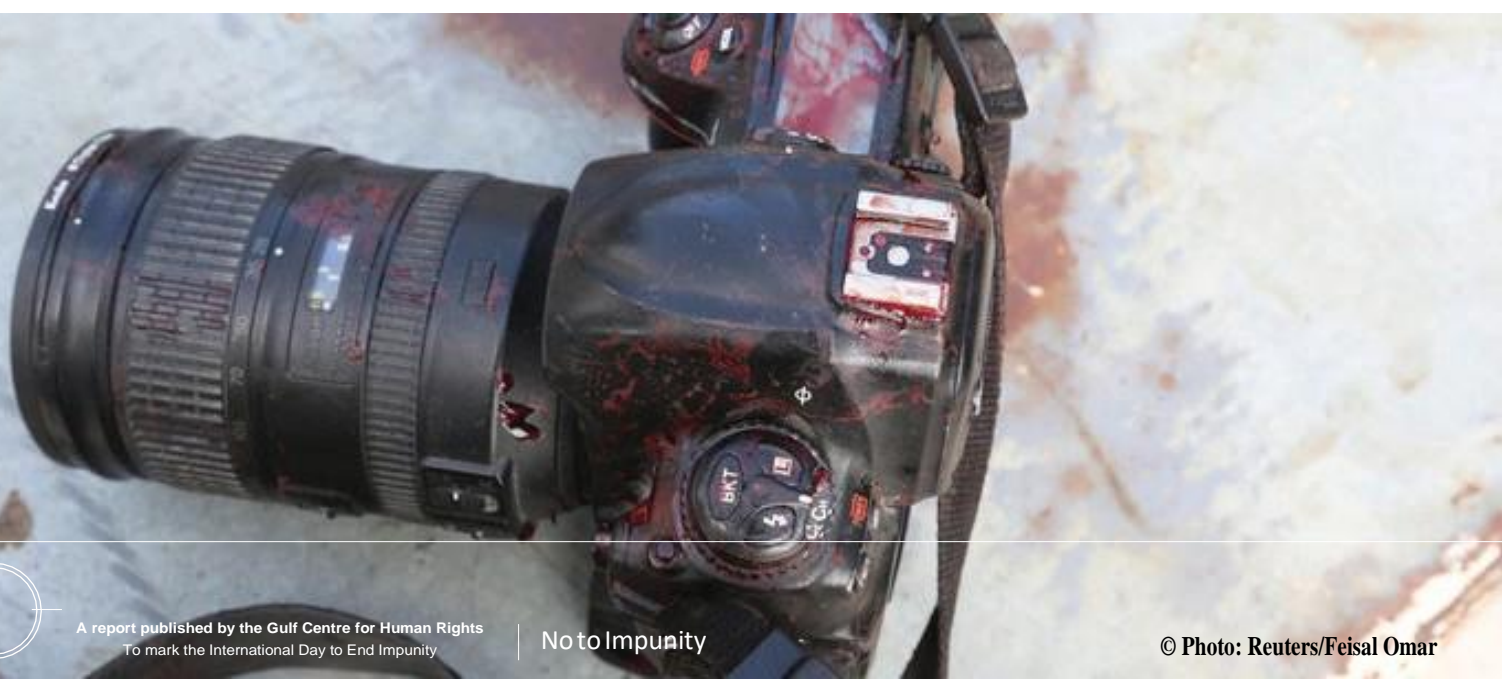
During 2019 and into 2020, citizens in Iraq, Lebanon, Algeria, Iran, Sudan, and Egypt took to the streets in massive protests, demanding their basic rights, the elimination of corruption and comprehensive political reform. They were confronted by security forces and armed groups with lethal force in Iraq, where hundreds of peaceful protesters lost their lives and thousands were injured. They have been suppressed in other countries to varying degrees.

The protesters have achieved a number of their goals in some of these countries. In Sudan, in April 2019, the army announced the removal of President Omar Al-Bashir from power and the start of a two-year transitional period after the longest period of rule by a Sudanese president, lasting for 30 years. In Algeria, in April 2019, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika presented a letter to the Constitutional Council, announcing the termination of his mandate as president, after 20 years in power. In Iraq, in October 2019, Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi formally resigned. In Lebanon, Prime Minister Saad Hariri announced his resignation in November 2019. These resignations came as a result of the widespread popular movements that swept through these countries and is still continuing in some of them, such as Iraq and Lebanon.

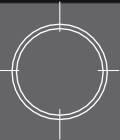
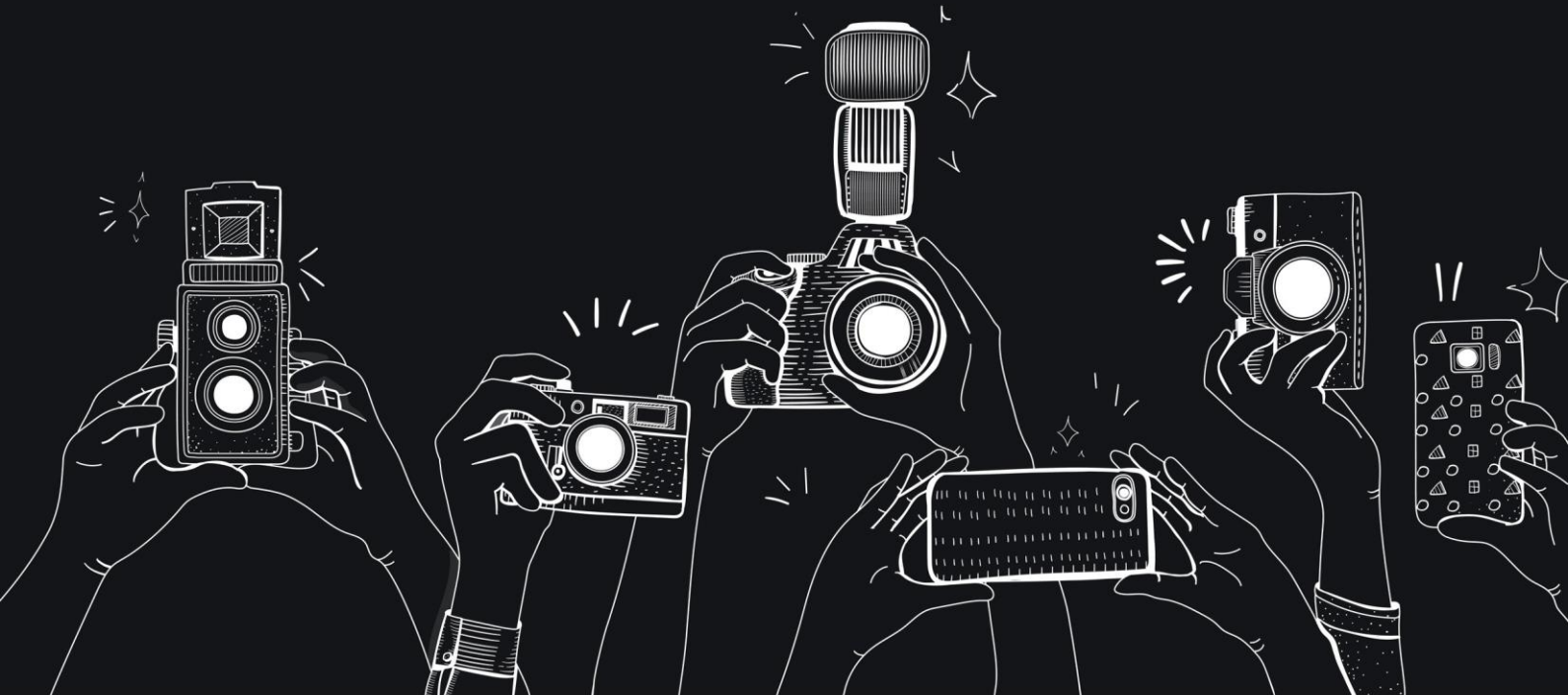
In all these protests and those of the previous years, journalists were at the forefront facing all kinds of dangers, including murder, while they were doing their professional work to document these watershed moments in the history of the peoples of the region. Sadly, many journalists lost their lives due to their coverage in areas of armed conflict such as Yemen, Libya, Iraq and Syria, while others lost their lives for covering issues related to the rampant corruption in countries throughout the region, or for daring to exercise their right to freedom of expression.

This report presents the photos of a group of journalists who have sacrificed their lives for freedom of speech, so they must be honoured and memorialized.

In most of their cases, there has been total impunity for those responsible for abusing or murdering the journalists mentioned in this report, particularly for the masterminds of murders such as Jamal Khashoggi in Saudi Arabia. As we mark the International Day to End Impunity on 02 November 2020, we again call for justice in their cases.



Cases of Journalists Killed



Iraq



Ahmed Abdul Samad

Safaa Ghali

On 10 January 2020, in Basra, unidentified gunmen on a motorbike shot at journalist Ahmed Abdul Samad, a correspondent of the Dijlah satellite TV channel, killing him

instantly with a fatal shot to the head. His colleague, photojournalist Safaa Ghali, was transferred to Basra General Hospital after being shot three times in the chest, and died as a result of severe injuries.

The two men were driving their car around 6pm when the attack occurred, near the Assyrian Club. They had just ended their coverage of the massive demonstrations that took place in Basra, including the sit-in that occurred in front of the Police Headquarters building after the arrest of a number of individuals. The detainees were soon released after the building was surrounded by their fellow protesters.

Samad, 39 years old, is a courageous journalist who worked with several television channels, and has made every effort to convey the voice of demonstrators in Basra. He also used his Facebook page to address his fellow citizens, saying, "I will use it to communicate with you to pass on your suffering and concerns. Interact with the page as it will be a challenge to politicians and help to citizens."

Hours before his assassination, the journalist published a video clip in which he criticised the crackdown on protesters and also said, "Our cause is the cause of our homeland." Prior to his killing, Samad received many threats from militants due to his work as a journalist.

Broadcaster and photojournalist Hisham Fares Al-Adhami, 27 years old, from the neighbourhood of Adhamiya in Baghdad, was one of the first Iraqi journalists to sacrifice their lives while participating in and documenting the ongoing popular movement that started in October 2019.

On 04 October 2019, a sniper's bullet penetrated his back and exited through the heart to lose his life immediately. He was covering the demonstrations that were taking place in Baghdad's Al-Tayaran Square. He completed his studies in the directing department of the Academy of Fine Arts and worked as a program director for Alsumaria Satellite Channel and a photographer for Almasar Satellite Channel. His Facebook page tells how he used the TV programs to which he contributed as a means to express his human spirit in order to serve the people.



Véronique Robert was a Franco-Swiss journalist and war correspondent, who died in a Paris hospital on 24 June 2017, at age 54, after being wounded in an explosion in Mosul, Iraq, five days earlier.

She was assigned to Iraq for the France 2 TV channel's programme "Envoyé Spécial". Robert was transferred to a hospital near the French capital after being seriously wounded on 19 June 2017. Two of her colleagues, Stephan Villeneuve and Bakhtyar Haddad, lost their lives during the same attack



Iraqi Kurdistan

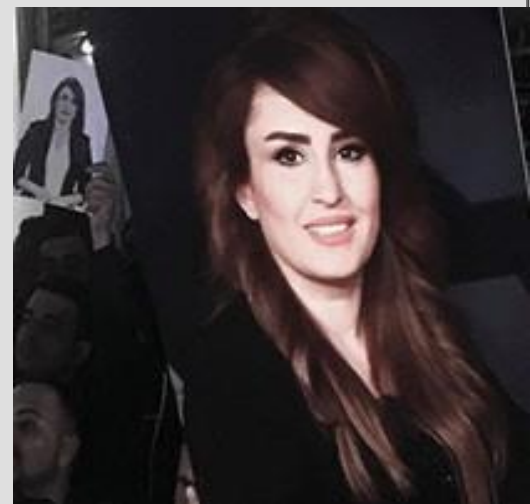


Television cameraman Arkan Sharif was killed in the Iraqi city of Daquq, in the Governorate of Kirkuk, on 30 October 2017. He worked for Kurdistan TV and was also a teacher.

In the early hours of 30 October, armed men broke into Sharif's home and killed him in a brutal knife attack in front of his wife and children. Kurdistan TV blamed militants for his death, but nobody has been arrested or prosecuted for the murder.

On 25 February 2017, Shifa Zikri Ibrahim, known as Shifa Gardi, lost her life and the photographer Younis Mustafa was wounded by a landmine explosion while covering the battles in Mosul.

Shifa Gardi was born on 01 July 1986 during her family's exile to Iran. She graduated in 2006 from the Technical Institute's Department of Computers and received in 2013 a Bachelor's degree of media from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Salahaddin. She started journalism in 2006 and worked as a teacher from 2007 to 2010 with her media work. She was one of the stars of the Kurdish media in general, and in the beginning of the operations of Mosul against Daesh, provided a program called Fox Mosul, and worked as a correspondent on the battlefields to transfer information and the latest developments. She also was an active director of news production.



On 13 August 2016, journalist Widad Hussein Ali left his home for work in the city of Duhok. He was later kidnapped in the Malta district by an unknown armed group. At 12:30pm he was found dead, thrown on the road between Duhok city and Cemel village. Information suggested that he was tortured to death. Ali, 28 years old, started working as a reporter for RojNews just several months prior to his death. According to a statement published by RojNews, he had been summoned many times to appear for investigation before the Asayish, which is the Kurdish security service and the primary intelligence agency operating in the Kurdistan region.

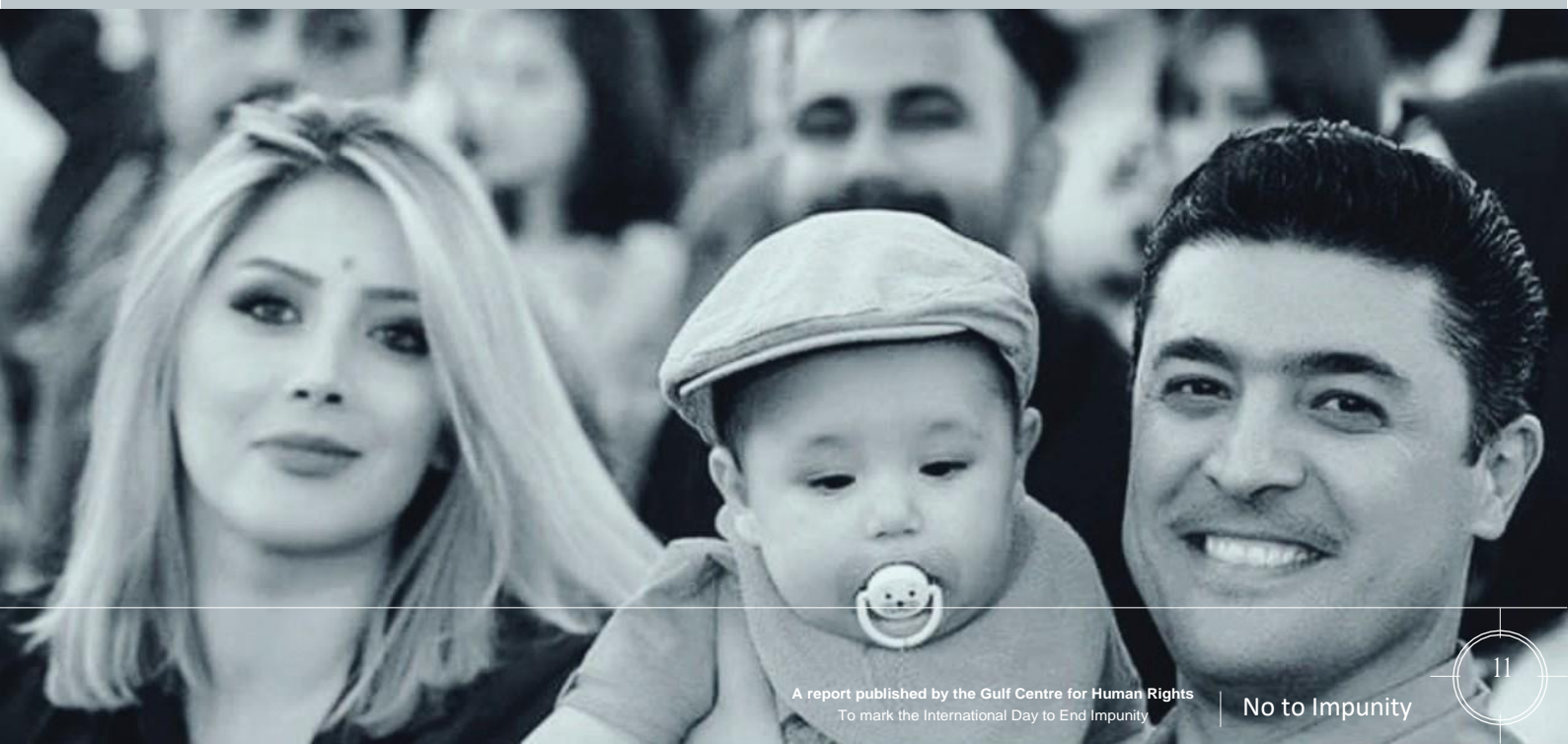




On 05 November 2013, two unidentified gunmen opened fire on Kawa Kermyani and killed him in front of his house in the district of Kelar in the province of Sulaymaniyah, 270 km north of the capital Baghdad. Kermyani, aged 32, worked as chief editor of the local Kurdish magazine Rayal and as a correspondent for the weekly magazine Awene, and had written several articles about corruption in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. He faced many cases in court related to his anti-corruption writings, which were raised against him by officials and others.

On 16 October 2019, passers-by found the bodies of married journalists Amanj Babany, 40 years old, and Lana Mohammady, 29 years old, along with their three-year-old baby boy Hano, in their car, parked in front of the Shahrazur garage in Sulaimaniya. Babany presented No Frontiers on NRT television channel, while Mohammady had been a presenter for several years at Kurdsat TV channel. They were found after 9 pm and local citizens took them to the Chara Teaching Hospital. Eyewitnesses said gunmen fired live bullets at the car, which showed signs of the gunfire, killing the family.

On 17 October 2019, the police chief of Sulaimaniya Governorate, Brigadier General Aso Taha, held a press conference in which he announced that Babany had fired a pistol found in the car, killing his wife first, followed by his son and had then killed himself. He described the incident as a "suicide". His account contradicts eyewitness reports of gunmen.



Saudi Arabia

Jamal Khashoggi, a writer for the Washington Post, was killed and his body dismembered by a group of Saudis shortly after he entered his country's consulate in Istanbul on 2 October 2018. Following a six-month investigation into the murder, on 19 June 2019, the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnès Callamard, published her findings in a report in which she concluded: "The circumstances of Mr. Khashoggi's death have led to numerous theories and allegations, but none alters the responsibility of the Saudi Arabia State." She found the Saudi government responsible for the "premeditated execution" of Khashoggi. On 20 June 2019, the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) issued an appeal in which it welcomed the report. The report was the result of a six-month probe investigating the killing of the journalist.

On 07 September 2020, the Criminal Court in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, issued its final verdicts in the case and sentenced eight men for periods ranging from seven to 20 years. The court overturned five death sentences originally handed down in the case. The Public Prosecution's Office stated that the court had sentenced five of the convicted to 20 years in prison, one of them to 10 years in prison and two of them to seven years in prison. The Public Prosecution also acquitted the former advisor to the crown prince, Saud Al-Qahtani, the consul in Istanbul Muhammad Al-Otaibi, and Major General Ahmed Asiri, the former deputy director of intelligence. No charges were brought against them, and they were released. It was a closed trial away from the public eye and the media, and the names of those who were sentenced were not even revealed.



Egypt



Mayada Ashraf was killed on 28 March 2014 by two bullets in the head and chest while covering the so-called "Ain Shams" events. It involved confrontations between the Egyptian police forces and demonstrations by supporters of the deposed president Mohammed Morsi who were protesting against Army Chief Abdul-Fattah Al-Sisi's announcement that he would resign from the army and run for president.

Ashraf worked on the websites of both Al-Dustour and MasrAlarabia. She obtained a Bachelor's degree from the Department of Journalism at the Faculty of Media in 2013 where her graduation project won first place in the college. She was the only daughter of her family and after her death, her junior high school in Menoufia governorate was given her name.

Syria



Hamoud Jneed

On 23 November 2018, human rights defender Raed Fares and media activist Hamoud Jneed were shot dead by unknown assailants wielding machine guns in Kafranbel, in a rebel-held area near Idlib, northwestern Syria.

Fares, who founded the Kafranbel Media Centre, was well-known for his peaceful protests against the war, and for his popular Radio Fresh broadcasts. The murder was clearly premeditated, as the assassins waited in a van outside the office the two men shared and then followed them before murdering them in their car. Fares had faced a previous assassination attempt on 29 January 2014, which he survived with two bullet wounds in the arm and shoulder. There has been total impunity in the case.



Raed Fares with his two sons



Abdel Nasser Haj Hamdan, a journalist working as a photographer for the Binnish Media Office, was killed on 20 February 2020 in the locality of Maarat Al-Naasan, in the north of Idlib province, while covering Russian and Syrian bombing in the area



Amjad Aktalati, a journalist who covered local military activity for his Facebook followers, was killed in Ariha, in the south of Idlib province, on 04 February 2020. “The situation in Ariha is catastrophic,” he said in his last Facebook post.

Journalists Dilshan Ibash and Hawker Faisal Mohammed died in Syria on 12 and 13 October 2017 respectively in a terrorist attack executed by Da'esh.

Ibash died in a car bomb explosion in Abu Fas, in eastern Syria, while Mohammed sustained head injuries in the blast and died in hospital the following day. Both victims were reporters of the Hawar News agency. A large number of civilians, many of them internally displaced people, died in the blast, and many more were injured.

The Hawar team was covering the arrival of thousands of displaced people coming from the areas controlled by Da'esh in Deir Ezzor to the areas controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces, when two car bombs targeting a gathering of displaced persons from Deir Ezzor Governorate exploded in the Abu Fas region, south of Hasaka.



Dilshan Ibash



Hawker Faisal Mohammed



Marie Colvin

Marie Colvin, a journalist for the Sunday Times, and freelance French photojournalist Remi Ochlik were killed in Homs in a bombardment by Syrian forces on 22 February 2012.

Colvin was an experienced and renowned war reporter who had covered numerous conflicts in various parts of the world over 30 years and wore a distinctive black eye patch after losing an eye to a shrapnel wound in Sri Lanka in 2001. She was voted Foreign Correspondent of the Year in the British Press Awards 2010.

Ochlik was a 28-year-old photographer represented by the IP3 agency, which he co-founded in Paris, who quit his studies at aged 20 to report on Haiti and then went on to cover many of the popular movements in the Arab world. He won a World Press Photo award in 2012.



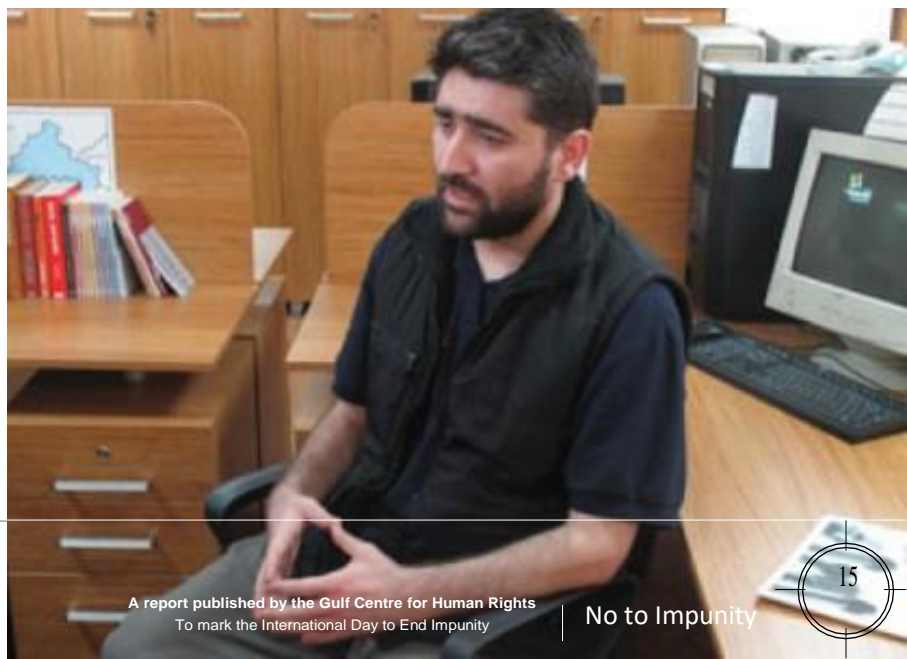
Remi Ochlik

On 31 January 2019, a United States judge ruled that the government of President Bashar Al-Assad was responsible for the deliberate and unlawful killing of Colvin in 2012 and ordered the Syrian government to pay more than USD \$300 million in damages to her family. While the decision brings some measure of justice in the case, it is unenforceable. Ochlik's family also launched a case in France.

In April 2019, seven years after the arrest and disappearance of Ali Mahmoud Othman, a citizen journalist from Homs, his family were finally informed of his death. They were told he died in government custody on 30 December 2013, 21 months after his arrest.

Othman became the go-to person in Homs for many journalists in 2012, and eventually became the head of a media center called Baba Amr News. He has been described as being fearless, taking journalists to the frontlines, filming under dire conditions, and even carrying injured people to safety. He did many live interviews in which his face was not covered, which is believed to have made him a target of the Syrian security forces.

On 28 March 2012, Othman was arrested by a military unit in Aleppo, and transferred to prison in Damascus, after which Addounia TV aired what is believed to be his forced confession in May 2012. Local sources in Baba Amr reported that he had been tortured. Since then he disappeared in Syria's prison system, and despite many organisations and governments making enquiries about his well-being in the past years, there was no response from the Syrian authorities. Like many Syrian families, Othman's family lived with no information but with the hope that he would someday be released.



Lebanon

Gebran Tueni, was assassinated by a car bomb on 12 December 2005 in Mkalles, an industrial suburb of Beirut.

Tueni, 48-Years-old, was the publisher and editor of the Lebanese newspaper An-Nahar, established by his grandfather, also named Gebran Tueni, in 1933.

Tueni was a press freedom activist who was on the Board of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), which named a press freedom award after him.

His murder was investigated as part of a UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) created to investigate the murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri. On 18 August 2020, the STL convicted Salim Jamil Ayyash for the murder of Hariri and acquitted three others.

Samir Kassir was assassinated on 02 June 2005, in Beirut, when a bomb placed under his car was detonated in front of his home.

He taught at the Université of Saint-Joseph's political science institute and joined An-Nahar newspaper as an op-ed writer and the director of the paper's publishing house. Kassir's articles and op-eds in An-Nahar paper in the late 1990s and early 2000s are still viewed as the boldest writings against the Syrian hegemony in Lebanon, the rule of former President Emile Lahoud, and the political role of security apparatuses. He published many books including in 2004 two books in Arabic: Democracy in Syria and Lebanon's Independence and Askar Ala Meen.

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Yemen

Abu Dhabi TV producer Ziad Al-Sharabi was killed in a bombing in Yemen's Red Sea port city of Mocha, on 28 January 2019. His colleague Faisal Al-Thubani, was wounded in the explosion.

Al-Thubhani said that the bomb went off as he and Al-Sharabi sat down for dinner at a restaurant. He said that the two of them ate regularly at the restaurant while on assignment in the area. The journalists had been working on a piece about how the ongoing conflict has affected the livelihoods of Yemeni fishermen working off of the western coast. "We had finished preparing and sending our material and were sitting down for dinner," said Al-Thubani, adding, "The site is not a military site and does not represent a threat to any party."



Faisal Al-Thubani

Abdullah Al-Qadry, a photographer and camera operator for the privately owned station Belqees TV, who worked for Agence France-Presse (AFP), was killed in Qaniyah in Yemen on 13 April 2018. He was killed in a missile attack while covering clashes in Bayda. Three other journalists were also wounded in the shelling of Qaniyah, near the border between Ma'rib and Al-Bayda provinces in the centre of the country.

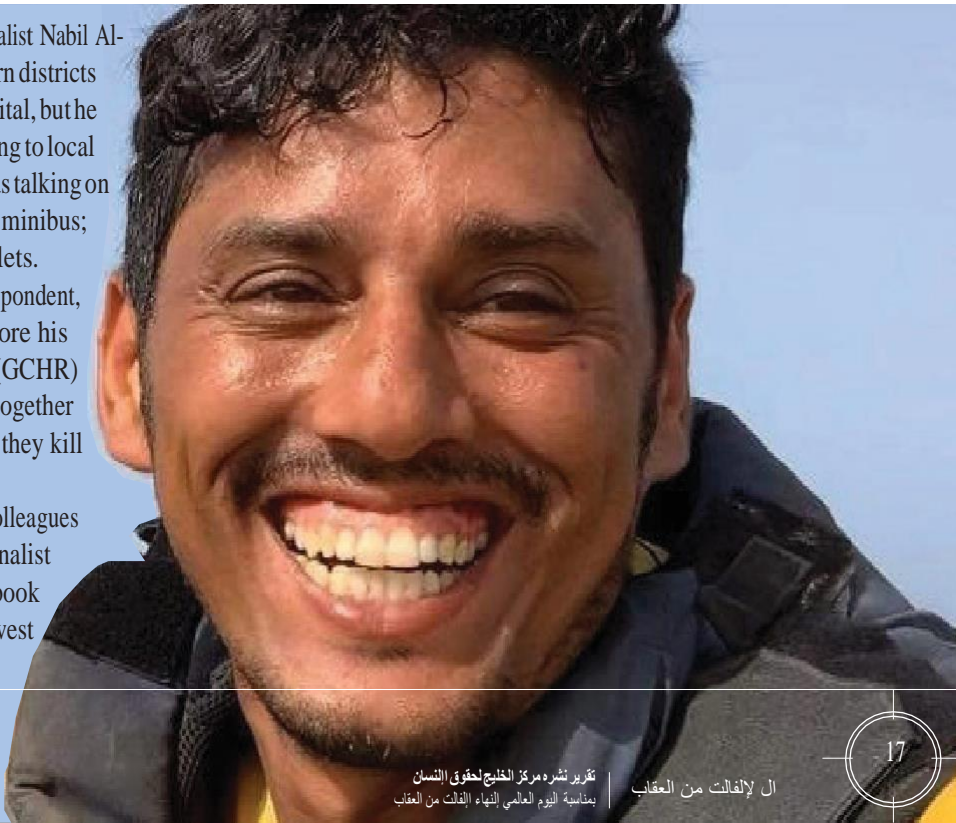
Al-Qadry died from a shrapnel wound to the neck, according to a doctor at the hospital to which he was evacuated.



On 02 June 2020, unidentified gunmen assassinated photojournalist Nabil Al-Qaiti, near his house in the city of Dar Saad, one of the southern districts of Aden Governorate. Neighbours transferred him to the hospital, but he died when he arrived due to the injuries he sustained. According to local reports, someone in a car first attempted to hit him while he was talking on his mobile phone near his house, forcing him to hide behind a minibus; the gunmen in the car then surprised him with a hail of bullets.

Al-Qaiti, who worked as an Agence France-Presse (AFP) correspondent, posted a tweet on his Twitter account just two hours before his assassination. Khalid Ibrahim, Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) Executive Director, said, "He was always carrying his camera together with his warm smile, and never carried a weapon. Why did they kill him?"

Al-Qaiti's death was followed by widespread tributes from his colleagues and other journalists. Huda Al-Attas, a Southern Yemeni journalist and author who has won a number of awards, said on her Facebook page: "Your camera lens was stronger than the barrel of the newest cannons."



On 20 December 2016, prominent journalist Mohammed Al-Abbsi died in Sana'a, the capital of Yemen, after he suffered a heart attack. He was transferred to the hospital, but the lack of proper medical care resulted in the loss of his life, according to local reports.

Al-Abbsi, 35 years, was an independent journalist who published numerous news stories and articles about corruption in Yemen, for which he was constantly targeted.

His family demanded that the burial be stopped and requested an autopsy because his death seemed suspicious, and because he had been receiving threats over his ongoing investigation of oil companies owned by Houthi leaders. An autopsy of the body was carried out 18 days after his death and samples were transferred to the Jordanian capital Amman to conduct a toxicology examination. The results, which were released on 5 February 2017, confirmed that he was killed by exposure to a toxic gas, thus adding further complexity to his death. Human rights organisations called for a transparent investigation and full disclosure of the circumstances of his death, but the case has not been resolved.



Bahrain

On 30 October 2017, human rights defender and Al-Wasat journalist Mahmoud Abdul-Ridha Al- Jazeeri was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment and his nationality was ordered to be revoked. On 28 December 2015, Al-Jazeeri

was arrested during a raid on his home by security forces in plain clothes. His arrest came one day after he wrote an article reporting on the regular consultative (Shura) council's session, during which an MP asked authorities to punish Bahrainis who had their citizenship revoked on political grounds by depriving them of government housing. He was convicted of supporting terrorism, inciting hatred of the regime, having contacts with a foreign country, and seeking to overthrow the government by joining Al-Wafa and the February 14 Youth Movement. He was subjected to ill-treatment in detention including being blindfolded and not being allowed to sit or sleep for almost three days. His case was added to this report due to the lengthy prison sentence he is facing on fabricated charges in a show trial that lacked the minimum international standards for fair trial and due process.



Ahmed Ismail Hassan was 22-years-old when he was fatally shot by Bahraini security forces in March 2012. Hassan was a videographer and journalist who often covered protests, marches and rallies across Bahrain. While documenting a peaceful protest, he was shot by security forces, and ultimately died from his wounds later that day. On 31 March 2012, there was a gathering in Salmabad, Bahrain, southwest of the capital, Manama, where demonstrators were protesting the Formula One Grand Prix. After riot police dispersed the protesters with rubber bullets and tear gas, armed men accompanied by security forces fired live ammunition at the demonstrators. Hassan was among those who were shot by the riot police, and a bullet severed a major artery in his upper thigh. Witnesses reported that Hassan was specifically targeted because he was carrying a video camera. While he was the first person involved in protests who was shot to death in 2012, he was the third Bahraini journalist killed since the beginning of protests in 2011 and one of 82 journalists killed worldwide in 2012.



Palestine



Palestinian community radio journalist Ahmed Abu Hussein died in Gaza on 25 April 2018. Abu Hussain, 24, a journalist for the Gaza-based community radio station Sawt Al Shaab, sustained bullet wounds in northern Gaza on 13 April 2018 that proved fatal. He wore a protective vest marked “Press” at the protest on 13 April, witnesses said. Photos of Abu Hussein lying wounded in his vest appeared on social media. He was the second journalist killed by Israeli gunfire since the weekly Friday protests, for a right of return of Palestinians refugees and their descendants to homes, began earlier that year on 30 March 2018.

Libya



Libyan photographer and cameraman Mohamed Ben Khalifa was killed by shrapnel from a rocket while covering ongoing clashes between rival militias in the south of Tripoli on 19 January 2019. He was 35 years old and the father of one child. Although technically a freelancer, Ben Khalifa had worked for more than four years for the Associated Press (AP) news agency.

Recommendations

Following up on recommendations made during an event organised by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) with partners including UNESCO to mark the occasion of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists on 02 November 2018, and at GCHR's Gulf Platform for Human Rights Defenders in the MENA region in January 2019, GCHR calls again for immediate action and:

1. Calls on all government in the MENA region to respect journalistic work and to provide all kinds of support and protection to journalists who are overwhelmed with covering popular protests, those working in areas of armed conflict, or others who write with high professionalism about cases of corruption;
2. Calls on all concerned institutions to take note that most of the murders and other criminal violations committed against journalists and human rights defenders by government agencies or extremist militias have been carried out by unknown persons yet to be identified;
3. Urges an immediate and serious investigation in order to find practical and effective mechanisms that decisively end impunity in crimes against journalists in all countries in our region;
4. Urges governments and other relevant agencies work strenuously to hold accountable those who committed crimes against journalists and that perpetrators and masterminds of these violations will not remain unidentified and escape impunity;
5. Calls on all concerned parties provide proper protection to journalists in MENA countries and beyond so that they can carry out their work to the fullest extent;
6. Calls on all countries in the MENA region to adopt the recommendations of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.



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