



PRESS

End Impunity Protect Journalists

02 November International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists

No to Impunity

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

02 November 2022

www.gc4hr.org



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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With the support of the
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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, Palestine and Yemen continue to be classified among the most dangerous places for journalists.

The shocking murder of US-Palestinian journalist **Shireen Abu Akleh** on 11 May 2022 by Israeli Defense Forces may also go unpunished, as long as there is not enough pressure from the various international mechanisms. Within weeks, yet another Palestinian woman journalist, **Ghufran Warasneh**, was murdered while reporting on camera on 1 June 2022.

Women are further at risk due to gender-based threats of violence, defamation and insults, and attempts to humiliate and intimidate them online to prevent them from working. This has a silencing effect on women journalists throughout the region, where women have been surveilled in a gross violation of their privacy or had doctored (deepfake) images of them unclothed circulated on the Internet, including leading Al-Jazeera journalists.

As we mark the 10th anniversary of the [UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of the Impunity](#), the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) calls for increased protection of journalists in the MENA region and accountability for their murders.

As part of GCHR's project with the UNESCO's Global Media Defense Fund on "Investigating impunity for crimes against journalists in the Arab States, while providing protection", GCHR carried out a survey of journalists' protection needs and awareness of UN and EU mechanisms, which shows that our support is desperately needed. Of the 55 journalists surveyed from at least 10 countries, 82% of journalists feel a "high" or "very high" level of risk in their work.

In March 2022, GCHR launched a survey of journalists' protection needs and awareness of UN and EU mechanisms and received 55 responses, including 27% women. The responses came from journalists from Bahrain, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Yemen, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria. Some of them are prominent journalists who have been imprisoned or exiled. The survey asked which journalists' protection groups they knew about and what kinds of assistance they needed.

Among the comments that are most illuminating from the survey about the needs of journalists in the MENA region, are several from Syrian journalists. "For us, as Syrian journalists, we do not have any agency that specialises in protecting us, especially since most of us are wanted and our lives are threatened by several parties, which is obvious by looking at the number of journalists who were killed in Syria while covering the events of the war. Please support journalists more so that they can report the news and cover the events safely."

Another Syrian journalist commented "It must be part of the constitution of any country to protect journalists and this should be included in the electoral programs of any party running for power."

This is a very real question for GCHR as it tries to help journalist inside their own countries as well as those in exile, who fled for their lives. What more can we do to help them?

An Algerian journalist responded, "Except for relocating journalists' from the environment that hinders the professional practice of their work, I do not see any other way to help them. Even in this case, being away from the environment under investigation will inevitably lead to a loss of sense of what is actually going on. In the end, I think it's a vicious cycle. A real dilemma."

"A journalist's access to protection enables them to access issues that are more relevant to reality and to reveal the facts and the underlying causes behind political, social and economic problems," said another journalist. One Iraqi journalist commented: "It's necessary to discuss the situation of the families of relocated journalists who remain inside the country, and to also count the number of journalists who wanted to leave the areas under militia control but were unable to leave because their families would become hostages."

Perhaps most illuminating of all, a journalist from Iraq said, "I really hope that the story of protecting journalists does not remain trapped in ink, theories, and on laptops. The topic needs a smart solution on the ground."

Every year, GCHR publishes a report on the International Day to End Impunity and holds an awareness-raising event to help shine a light on the journalists killed in the past year. This report includes new cases of journalists killed with impunity in Iran, Yemen, Palestine

They include **Shireen Abu Akleh**, a US-Palestinian journalist who worked for Al-Jazeera for 25 years, who was killed on 11 May 2022, while covering a raid by the Occupation Forces in the Jenin Refugee camp in the West Bank, Abu Akleh was shot even though she was wearing a blue vest with "PRESS" written on it. Palestinian journalist **Ghufran Harun Warasneh** was shot dead by Israeli forces on 01 June 2022 at an Israeli checkpoint near the Al-Arroub refugee camp in the occupied West Bank. Warasneh was killed as she commuted to her new job at Dream radio station in the city of Hebron.

In Yemen, several journalists have been killed by explosive devices planted in their cars. On 15 June 2022, 42-year-old journalist **Saber Noman Al-Haidari**, a correspondent of the Japanese NHK TV Channel, was killed after an explosive device planted in his car blew up in Al-Mansoura, a city located in Aden Governorate. On the evening of 09 November 2021, 27-year-old journalist **Rasha Abdullah Al-Harazi**, who was nine months pregnant, was killed when the car driven by her husband exploded while driving to the hospital to give birth. An explosive device planted in the car driven by her husband.

In Iran, journalists have died of medical neglect. **Baktash Abtin** (also known as **Mehdi Kazemi**) was an Iranian poet, writer, human rights defender, and film maker. Abtin was charged on 15 May 2019 with "illegal assembly and collusion against national security" and "spreading propaganda against the state". He was sentenced to six years' imprisonment. Baktash Abtin entered Evin Prison in Tehran on 26 September 2020. After being placed into a medically induced coma following complications from Covid-19, Abtin died on 08 January 2022, at the age of 48.

Sometimes there appears to be justice in cases of journalists killed. But sometimes that justice is false. In Iraq, the man arrested for killing journalist and well-known security expert [Dr. Hisham Al-Hashemi](#) (and who was imprisoned for it) was able to bribe his way out of prison this year, according to [a news report](#) in July 2022 to mark the second anniversary of his killing on 06 July 2020. Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi said: "We promised to arrest the killers of Hisham Al-Hashemi and we fulfilled the promise." Al-Hashemi's killer, was among a group of four people who carried out the crime. He admitted in a [recording broadcast](#) on state television that he shot Al-Hashemi with his government pistol.

This year, on 02 November 2022, GCHR is organising an event in Tunis to mark the International Day to End Impunity, co-sponsored by UNESCO's Regional office in Beirut and IFEX. This report on impunity will be launched at the event.

This report presents the photos of a group of journalists in the Middle East and North Africa who have sacrificed their lives for freedom of speech, so they must be honoured and memorialised.

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 Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. As we mark the International Day to End Impunity on 02 November 2022, we again call for justice in their cases.



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Cases of Journalists Killed

Palestine

1-Shireen Abu Akleh

Shireen Abu Akleh, a Palestinian journalist born on 03 April 1971, worked as a reporter for the Arabic-language channel Al-Jazeera for 25 years, and was one of the most prominent names across the Middle East for her decades of reporting in the occupied Palestinian territories. Over the course of her career, she reported on numerous major events affecting Palestinians, while also analysing Israeli politics. Her televised reporting and distinctive sign-offs became common knowledge, and, as a leading journalist in the Arab world, she was a source of inspiration for many other Palestinians and Arabs, particularly as a role model for Arab women intent on pursuing careers in journalism.



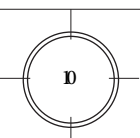
On 11 May 2022, while covering a raid by the occupied forces in the Jenin Refugee camp in the West Bank, Abu Akleh was shot and killed, even though she was wearing a blue vest with "PRESS" written on it.

In September 2022, Palestinian human rights group Al-Haq and the UK-based research agency Forensic Architecture released [a report](#) which confirmed that Abu Akleh was “deliberately and repeatedly targeted, along with her colleagues, despite being clearly identified as a member of the press.” This report confirms previous findings of what happened, including by the [United Nations](#), which placed responsibility for her killing on the Israeli forces, stating that the bullet that killed her was “well aimed.”



2-Ghufraan Warasneh

Palestinian journalist Ghufraan Harun Warasneh was shot dead by occupied forces on 1 June 2022 at an Israeli checkpoint near the Al-Arroub refugee camp in the occupied West Bank. Warasneh was killed as she commuted to her new job at Dream radio station in the city of Hebron. Warasneh, 31, graduated from Hebron University and had worked for other media before joining Dream recently. She had previously been jailed for three months by Israeli authorities for covering a pro-Palestinian march in January 2022. Nobody has been held responsible for her death.



Iraq

3-Dr. Hisham Al-Hashemi

On 06 July 2020, an armed group riding two motorcycles shot journalist and well-known security expert Dr. **Hisham Al-Hashemi** in front of his house in the Zayouna area in the capital, Baghdad. After sustaining several gunshot wounds, including to his head, he died in Ibn Al-Nafees Hospital, where he was taken after the attack.

In July 2021, the Iraqi government announced the arrest of the main suspect in his murder, a first lieutenant working in the Ministry of Interior, and [broadcast his confessions](#) on the official Al-Iraqiya channel, but did not address the motives or the parties behind him.

The man arrested for killing [Dr. Al-Hashemi](#), Ahmed Hamdawi Owaid, was able to bribe his way out of prison this year, according to [a news report](#) which was published in July 2022 to mark the second anniversary of his killing on 6 July 2020. Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi had said: "We promised to arrest the killers of Hisham Al-Hashemi and we fulfilled the promise." Al-Hashemi's killer was among a group of four people who carried out the crime. He admitted that he shot Al-Hashemi with his government pistol.



3-Shifa Zikri Ibrahim

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.

Saudi Arabia



5-Jamal Khashoggi

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.

In April 2022, a Turkish court halted the trial of 26 Saudi suspects accused of killing Khashoggi in Istanbul and transferred the trial to Saudi Arabia, at the request of the Saudi authorities. Turkey's justice minister endorsed the request, which came at a time when the two countries were mending their relations.

Syria



6-Hussain Khattab

On 12 December 2020, masked gunmen on a motorbike shot the journalist Hussain Khattab, also known as Kara Al-Safrani, hitting him with several bullets in the head and chest, killing him instantly. He was targeted in the city of Al-Bab in the countryside of Aleppo, while he was preparing a media report on Covid-19. His killers are currently unknown.

Khattab, originally from the city of Al-Safira in the eastern countryside of Aleppo, has been subjected to previous threats. He worked in several media outlets, the most recent of which the Turkish TV channel [TRT Arabic](#), for which provided video reports. He was a member of the executive office of the Aleppo Media Union.

Lebanon

7-Lokman Slim

On 04 February 2021, writer, publisher and political activist Lokman Slim was found dead in his car after being shot with four bullets in his head and one in the back. He was killed in the Addousiyyah area while returning from the town of Niha in southern Lebanon.

Born in 1962, Slim studied philosophy at the Sorbonne University in 1982 and returned to Beirut in 1988. In 1990 he founded the Al-Jadid Publishing House, which published Arabic literature and books of various topics. In 2001, he moved into cinema and founded “Nations for Documentation and Research” which has produced several films. He has authored several books and translations, including “Onsi Al-Hajj, a Poet and a Lebanese” with others in the year 2000.



8-Samir Kassir

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.

Kassir's 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.



Egypt



9-Mayada Ashraf

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.

Libya



10-Mohamed Ben Khalifa

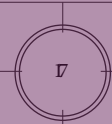
Libyan photographer and cameraman **Mohamed Ben Khalifa** was killed by shrapnel from a rocket while covering ongoing clashes between rival militias in the south of Tripoli on 19 January 2019. He was 35 years old and the father of one child. Although technically a freelancer, Ben Khalifa had worked for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

Somalia



11-Jamal Farah Adan

Jamal Farah Adan, a freelance contributor to local radio stations Radio Daljir, Radio Galkayo and Radio Garowe, was shot dead on 01 March 2021 by unidentified assailants in front of a shop owned by his family in Galkayo. A political journalist, Adan had recently received death threats in connection with his critical reporting on Al-Shabaab, the armed rebel group.





12-Baktash Abtin - Mehdi Kazemi

Baktash Abtin (also known as Mehdi Kazemi) was an Iranian poet, writer, human rights defender, and film maker. Abtin was charged on 15 May 2019 with "illegal assembly and collusion against national security" and "spreading propaganda against the state". He was sentenced to a total of six years' imprisonment. Baktash Abtin entered Evin Prison in Tehran on 26 September 2020.

On 04 April 2021, Abtin was transferred to the prison clinic with symptoms of pneumonia linked to COVID-19, but he was allegedly denied proper treatment and was released back to the general population in prison while still unwell, but he isolated himself from the rest of the inmates. Abtin was finally granted a medical furlough for treatment by family-appointed doctors in October 2021, after never having fully recovered. He was infected with COVID-19-related pneumonia again in December 2021. After being placed into a medically induced coma, Abtin died from his illness on 08 January 2022, at the age of 48.

Yemen

13-Rasha Abdullah Al-Harazi

On the evening of 09 November 2021, 27-year-old journalist **Rasha Abdullah Al-Harazi**, who was nine months pregnant, was killed while driving to the hospital to give birth. An explosive device planted in the car driven by her husband, journalist Mahmoud Al-Atmi, exploded on the way to the hospital in Aden, killing Al-Harazi and her unborn child. Al-Atmi was seriously injured and received treatment in intensive care. Al-Harazi worked as a reporter with Al-Sharq Media Channel, while Al-Atmi works with a number of Malian and Arab media outlets.



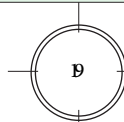
14-Fawaz Al-Wafi

On 24 March 2022, photojournalist **Fawaz Al-Wafii** was killed in Yemen. Citizens found him in the morning dead in his car in the Wadi Al-Qadi area of Taiz city, located 256 kilometers south of the capital, Sana'a. Local sources confirmed that unknown persons stabbed him several times in the chest the night before he was found. Al-Wafi used his Facebook page to post his personal opinions, comment on public affairs in the country, and convey the suffering of the citizens in their very difficult daily lives



15-Saber Noman Al-Haidari

On 15 June 2022, 42-year-old journalist **Saber Noman Al-Haidari**, a correspondent of the Japanese NHK TV Channel, was killed after an explosive device planted in his car blew up in Al-Mansoura, a city located in Aden Governorate. Local sources confirmed the death of two other people and the injury of a fourth person with burns as a result of the explosion.



Bahrain

16-Ahmed Ismail Hassan

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

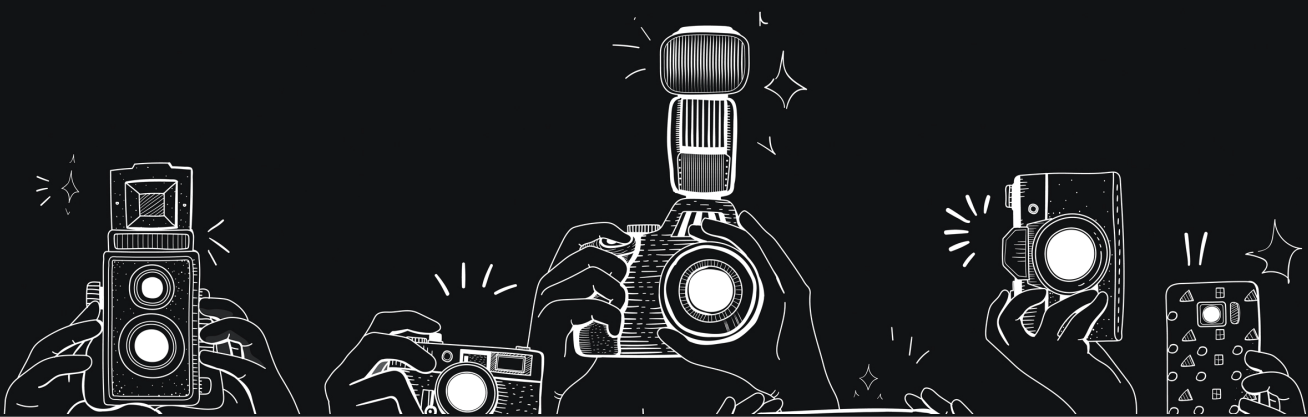
While he was the first person involved in protests who was shot to death in 2012, he was the third Bahraini journalist killed since the beginning of protests in 2011 and one of 82 journalists killed worldwide in 2012.



Recommendations

Following up on recommendations made during previous events 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, 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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