

Monthly Report Executive Summary

PRESS AND CULTURAL FREEDOM VIOLATIONS

LEBANON, SYRIA, JORDAN, PALESTINE

APRIL 2012

The intensity of violations of press freedom rose dramatically in April 2012. The Syrian army opened fire on the New TV crew in Wadi Khaled, at the Lebanese-Syrian border, killing cameraman Ali Shaaban. His colleagues Abdel Azim Khayat and Hussein Khreiss miraculously escaped death.

Violations in Syria were by far the most dangerous in the Levant region (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine) that the SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom monitors. The most violent exaction was undeniably the execution of Syrian activist Khaled Mahmoud Kabisho in Idlib; his head was then crashed by an army tank. Also, journalists Ons Al-Halwani and Samir Al-Sham were killed in Homs, Ahmad Abdallah Fakhriya in Al-Damir and Alaeddeen Al-Douri in Hama.

Below is a detailed summary of the violations compiled by the SKeyes Center in all four countries.

In **Lebanon**, the most atrocious violation was the killing of New TV cameraman, Ali Shaaban, after the Syrian army opened fire on the crew that was filming a report in the border area of Wadi Khaled. His colleagues Abdel Azim Khayat and Hussein Khreiss miraculously escaped death (04/09). Also, unknown gunmen shot five bullets on the car of writer Moustafa Moustafa Geha on the Damour highway, south of Beirut (04/14).

On another front, the Lebanese Army arrested bloggers and human rights activists Ali Fakhri and Khodor Salameh, who were drawing graffiti in the Bechara El-Khoury neighborhood in Beirut, taking part in the "Freedom Graffiti Week", launched by anti-regime Syrian artists (04/20). Security forces used violence against journalists and activists who gathered in the subsequent solidarity sit-in with the two bloggers; photographers Khaled Iyad and Hussein Beydoun were injured (04/21). Also, the MTV photographer, Elie Assaker was beaten while filming a school where a student was allegedly raped (04/02). The videos of MTV's technical team were confiscated, following an altercation with the guards of the Phalange (Kataeb) Party headquarters in Saifi (04/11). *Al-Arabiya* cameraman, Alain Khoury and producer Georges Nassif were attacked while filming a report for the "Special Mission" show in the area between Bab Al-Tabaneh and Jabal Mohsen in Tripoli (04/25). News also came out about the Syrian security gathering information on journalists who had signed the petition entitled "Southern Lebanese citizens supporting the revolution of their brothers in Syria" (04/05) and political activist Bechara Khairallah was victim of a defamation campaign and received threats on his Facebook page (04/28). The four discussion sessions organized at the Ministry of Labor around the dismissal of 397 Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) employees by PAC did not reach a positive outcome (04/04). News Broadcasting Network (NBN) employees also protested against the non-payment of





salaries (04/03) while Future TV dismissed 15 employees, after giving them financial compensation (04/03).

The [Lebanese Press Photographers' syndicate website](#) was hacked (04/15) and the group "Speak Up" announced it hacked a number of government websites twice in a short period of time (04/16). Also, a group of unknown persons hacked the [MTV](#) website (04/16) as well as the Facebook page of Sayed Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah (04/26).

Moreover, graffiti artist Semaan Khawam was brought to justice for "disturbing public order", after having spray-painted graffiti of soldiers resembling those who took part in the Lebanese civil; the judgment will be pronounced on June 25 (04/05). Journalists Joe Maalouf and Joyce Akiki appeared before the Attorney General of Beirut, in the lawsuit filed against them by Minister Nicolas Fattoush (04/05). Actors Edmund Haddad and Rawiya Al-Shab were judged for "public indecency", following a stand-up comedy show in 2009; the judgment should be issued on May 30 (04/25).

The "campaign for the boycott of Israel" asked the Red Hot Chili Peppers not to sing in Tel Aviv (04/25) and former MP Nasser Kandil strongly attacked the *New TV* channel (04/18) for what he said was biased coverage of the Syrian crisis after the killing of Ali Shaaban.

In **Syria**, the media and cultural freedom violations rose dramatically in April. Many journalists, photographers and activists were killed: Ons Al-Halwani (04/07) and Samir Al-Sham (04/13) in Homs, Ahmad Abdallah Fakhriya in Al-Damir (04/13) and Alaeddeen Al-Douri in Hama (04/14). But the most atrocious murder was that of activist Khaled Mahmoud Kabbisho in Idlib directly after his arrest; his head was then crashed by an army tank (04/17).

The Syrian security services arrested journalist Mary Issa and her husband, human rights activist, Joseph Nakhleh (04/14), activists Hussein Al-Imach (04/04), Mohammad Abdel-Mawla Al-Hariri (04/16) and Jalal Nawfal (04/22) as well as writer Salama Kaila (04/24). Also, the Syrian military justice accused the eight activists from the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, Hanadi Zahlout, Yara Bader, Razan Ghazzaoui, Thana Zitani, Mayada Khalil, Bassam Al-Ahmad, Joan Ferso and Ayham Ghazzoul, held since February, of "being in possession of banned publications for the purpose of distributing them" (04/22).

The Syrian Electronic Army hacked the [Al-Arabiya](#) channel website twice (04/17 and 04/23) as well as the Facebook page of artist Ali Ferzat (04/27).



In **Jordan**, the violations against media and cultural freedoms increased in scale during the month of April. MP Yahya Al-Saoud physically assaulted [AmmanNet](#) journalist, Iman Jradat, after insulting her while she was covering a protest in the Al-Tafiliye neighborhood. Al-Saoud also attacked photographer Zeid Al-Sarayra and broke his camera, while he was filming the aggression (04/06); he also uttered various insults at other Jordanian female journalists.

The State Security Court arrested journalist Jamal Al-Muhtasab for investigation, knowing that the journalist should only be judged before the Publications Court (04/23). The Minister of Information Rakan Al-Majali, in the former government, asked the *Al-Ra'i* daily to dismiss journalists Mohammad Al-Hawamda and Ghaith Al-Adayila (04/22). Journalists working for the daily protested against the Minister's interference (04/19). The *Al-Arab Al-Yawm* board of directors decided to dismiss journalist Adnan Bariya but the editor-in-chief refused to abide by the decision (04/10).

The Attorney General of Amman said Jordanian blogger Inas Mussallem was actually stabbed, thus rejecting the General Security initial report (04/25). Journalist Sami Al-Zubaidi accused the Minister of Information and the President of the Journalists' Syndicate of "conspiracy" in an attempt to amend the press law; the president of the Syndicate has however denied the accusations (04/24).

In the **Gaza Strip**, three violations were identified on the media and cultural scene during the month of April 2012. The security services of the Hamas deposed government intimidated blogger Muhannad Abdel-Bari inside the *Al-Quds* Open University for "spreading atheism and communism"; he removed the articles posted on his blog for fear of further repercussions (04/04). Also, the *Al-Quds* broadcaster, Mohammad Qniti, put an end to the *Panorama Al-Quds* program, following the pressure exerted by the Hamas government (04/01). The police at the Rafah crossing confiscated the passport of the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate (PJS) President in the West Bank, Tahsin Al-Astal, while returning from Egypt (04/07).

On a more positive point, the Minister of THE Interior, Fathi Hammad, gave instructions to facilitate the work of journalists and media institutions in the Gaza Strip, especially in terms of obtaining the necessary permits for the entry of foreign journalists. He also decided to ban the summoning of journalists for their journalistic work. However, this did not prevent the Journalists Syndicate in Gaza from imposing its opinion, particularly in terms of coordination and participation to the interrogations, in an attempt to reinforce the Syndicate's role in Gaza, in light of the feud between the Gaza and the West Bank syndicates.

In the **West Bank**, Israeli forces continued their violations against journalists in April 2012. *News Picture* photographer, Ahmad Daghlas, was hit by a grenade in the head, while covering the protest in Nabi Saleh (04/06). The Israeli forces also arrested journalist Mohammad Mona without any legal justification (04/03) and journalist Sahib Al-Assa was sentenced to four months of prison and a fine of 800 US dollars (04/15). The trial of *Radio Marah* broadcaster, Raed Al-Sharif was postponed for the fourth consecutive time (04/05).



Internally, the Palestinian Preventive Security arrested several journalists and bloggers: the *Zaman Press* correspondent, Tarek Khamis, was arrested for two hours (04/01), as well as Jamal Abu Rihan, in charge of the Facebook page “The people want to put an end to corruption” (04/02). The trial court of Ramallah released journalists Youssef Al-Shayeb (04/02) and Issmat Abdel Khalek (04/04) on bail.

In the **1948 Territories**, the violations against media and cultural freedom continued during the month of April 2012. The Israeli security forces stormed the headquarters of the *Hona Al-Quds* agency and arrested two persons (04/02). The Israeli authorities prevented journalist Abdel-Latif Ghaith from entering the West Bank (04/04). The “El-Al” Israeli airline security director prevented Palestinian artist Shreidi Jabarin from boarding the aircraft at the Berlin Airport and flying back to Palestine (04/27).

The Israeli Minister of Education banned the use of a civic education book under the pretext that it recounts the story of the Palestinian *Nakba* (04/17). The city of Haifa hosted an exhibition of drawings by Syrian artist Ali Ferzat and the “coalition against racism in Israel” submitted a petition to launch judicial proceedings against the rabbis who wrote the racist book “The King’s Torah”. The *I’lam* center began working on the creation of a lobby inside the Knesset to protect media-related rights of Palestinians; it also submitted a petition to the Supreme Court against a program offering free cultural activities only to Jewish kids. The “campaign for the boycott of Israel” called on Algerian writer Boualem Sansal to cancel his participation in the “International writers’ festival” of Jerusalem. It also warned against a racist bill that would limit the enactment of new laws related to human rights. Finally, it called on authorities to abolish the bill, according to which Arab students are not allowed to be elected at the head of the student board in the Safad Faculty and asked authorities to increase TV productions in Arabic language.

The [detailed monthly report for April 2012 \(in Arabic\)](#) is available on the website of the **SKeyes** Center for Media and Cultural Freedom.

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