

Monthly Report Executive Summary

Press and Cultural Freedom Violations

May, June 2013

LEBANON, SYRIA, JORDAN, PALESTINE

Ten journalists and citizen journalists were killed in Syria in May 2013. In June, the body of Aleppo's popular singer Abdel-Rahman Rustom was found in the Quwayq River; also, six citizen journalists lost their lives. Abductions, arrests and enforced disappearances flared up; in May, the regime's army arrested German journalist Armin Wertz and in June, French journalists Didier François and Edouard Elias went missing in Aleppo.

In Lebanon, violations against journalists increased in scale, especially during the coverage of clashes between the Army and Islamist militants in Sidon, and against civic activists, during the protests against the extension of the Parliament's term. In Jordan, the Press and Publication Department (PPD) blocked 213 news website, which raised a storm of protest, and the Israeli authorities continued their violations against Palestinian journalists and artists in the West Bank and the 1948 Territories.

Below is a detailed summary of the violations compiled by the SKeyes Center in the four countries it monitors: Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine.

In **Lebanon**, several journalists were physically assaulted in May 2013. Journalist Habib Battah was beaten and forced to delete photos he had taken of demolition of ruins in Beirut (05/14). In Tripoli, armed gunmen beat the AFP photographer, Ghassan Sweidan, who was taken to hospital in critical condition. Also, a group of armed men ambushed writer Rami Ollaik, at the entrance of his home town, Yuhmor (05/30). Unknown people had previously tried to set fire to his family house in the village (05/21), before threatening his cousin, Marwa Ollaik, a journalism student. Also, a gunman shot six bullets at the camera of an *Al-Jazeera* English crew in Tripoli (05/27) and unknown young people broke LBCI's camera in Bab Al-Tabbaneh, also in Tripoli (1e 05/28). Also, a car belonging to OTV was hit by a sniper bullet in Tripoli (05/20) and journalist Nadim Koteich was threatened several times on Facebook (05/09) and in an article published in the *Ad-Diyar* daily (05/27). Also, Hezbollah militants detained journalist Rabih Damaj and questioned him for five hours (05/09).

Farewell Beirut, a painting by Mohammad Saad depicting several Lebanese politicians, was withdrawn from an exhibition organized at Le Gray hotel (05/08). Also, the screening of "The Attack", a movie directed by Ziad Doueiri, was cancelled (05/08). Organizers of the screening at the Abraj center cited security reasons.



In June 2013, *An-Nahar* photojournalist Ahmad Mantas, was assaulted in Sidon and his camera was broken; also, the Daily Star correspondent, Ahmad Al-Zaatari, was slapped and threatened, Reuters' photographer, Ali Hashish, was insulted, civic activist Tarek Abu Zeinab was beaten while accompanying a crew from *Al-Arabiya*, and the camera of Ghassan Al-Zaatari, [SidoniaNews](#) editor-in-chief, was confiscated (06/28). A vehicle belonging to MTV was hit by two bullets (06/18). Also in relation to the clashes in Sidon, the Lebanese army expressed its intention to prosecute media outlets that "have falsified videos" (06/27) and hampered the work of journalists and photographers in Abra (06/30).

A camera belonging to *Al-Mayadeen* was broken and photographer Ali Ayash was hit by a stone in the region of Qasqas in Beirut (06/24). The car of Sleiman Amhaz, Future TV's Bekaa correspondent, was hit by a bullet (06/09), unknown men prevented the MTV team from filming in Tripoli (06/28), and dozens of gunmen gathered in front of journalist Domouh Al-Asmar's house in Tripoli, protesting against an article she published; three men broke into her apartment and forced her to apologize.

Dozens of bloggers and activists were beaten in front of the Parliament (06/20), during a protest against the extension of the Parliament's term. MP Nadim Gemayel's bodyguard ran his car into journalist Nidal Ayoub and other civic activists in front of the Gemmayzeh police station; they had organized a sit-in to ask for the release of activists who came to file a complaint against the MP's bodyguards, who attacked them inside the headquarters of *Nasawiya*, a feminist NGO (06/28).

In **Syria**, ten journalists and citizen journalists were killed in May 2013. Four of them were killed in Deraa: Zaher Khraibeh (05/04), Mohammad Sweidan (05/14), Mohammad Khawasneh (05/20), and Haytham Qotaifan (05/21). Also, Mohammad Al-Khalaf (05/02) and Ibrahim Qabbani (05/30) were killed in Idlib, Mohammad Atwan in Deir Ezzor (05/01), Tarek Soueid in Aleppo (05/04), Omar Al-Aadim in Damascus (05/08), and *Syrian TV* correspondent, Yara Abbas, was killed between Homs and Al-Qusayr by a rebel sniper (05/27). Citizen journalists Ahmad Abdel-Ghani Al-Khalaf and Ahmad Mahmoud were injured in Idlib (05/02).

Regime forces arrested German journalist Armin Wertz in Aleppo (05/05), playwright Omar Al-Jiba'i in Damascus (05/02), and journalist May Skaff also in Damascus (05/16); she was released several hours later. Also, the Criminal Chamber of the Anti-Terrorism Court questioned the Syrian Center for Media detainees, Mazen Darwish, Hussein Ghreir and Hani Al-Zaytani (05/08).

The Shari'a Committee (an Islamic judiciary authority set up in rebel-held territories) arrested journalist Shaaban Al-Hassan (05/25) and citizen journalists Shamel Al-Ahmad, Maan Mohammad, and Milad Shihabi (05/17). Members of the Free Syrian Army threatened citizen journalists at gunpoint in Deir Ezzor, which prompted journalists to go on a two hour strike protesting such actions (05/25). The opposition military council warned journalists and citizen journalists in Homs against



the publication of any news related to the council's activity or that of its battalions without prior notice (05/28).

Bloodshed continued in June. The body of Aleppo's popular singer Abdel Rahman Rustom was found in the Quwayq River (06/03) and citizen journalists Mohammad Zein (06/06), Raad Rustom (06/18), and Najib Darwish (06/21) were also killed in Aleppo. Majed Al-Balkhi (06/01) and Kinan Al-Mahamid (06/29) were killed in Daraa, and Abdel Karim Al-Moussa in Homs (6/28). Orient News TV correspondent, Mohammad Maaz, was injured in Rif Dimashq (06/06), *Al-Jazeera* correspondent, Ammar Al-Hajj in Deir Ezzor (06/26), citizen journalists Odai Al-Bardan in Daraa (06/15) and Omar Al-Qabuni in Damascus (06/19). The Free Syrian Army assaulted a member of the Sham News Network in Deraa, and subjected him to torture (06/16) and members of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party attacked journalist Farhad Amheh in Qamishli (06/29).

Regime forces arrested writer Samer Radwan on his way back to Syria (06/18) from Lebanon and released him three days later. They also arrested scriptwriter Fouad Homeira in Lattakia (06/27) and sound engineer Abdel Rahman Riya in Damascus (06/06). Also, journalist Bilal Bilal was sentenced to 15 years in jail (06/09) and an arrest warrant was issued in absentia against *Al-Jazeera* journalist, Faysal Al-Kassem (06/17). The *Al-Nusra* Front arrested citizen journalists Mustafa Al-Ahmadi in Aleppo (06/13) as well as Misaab Al-Hamidi and Yilmaz Bacha in Raqqa (06/14). The Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS) arrested citizen journalist Abboud Al-Haddad in Idlib (06/26).

French journalists Didier François and Edouard Elias were abducted in Aleppo (06/06) and the correspondent of *Al-Suri Al-Hurr* (The Free Syrian) channel, Amer Houeidi, went missing in Deir Ezzor (06/15). Connection was lost with Mohammad Al-Zohuri, *Orient News* correspondent in Al-Qusayr (06/06), and the regime canceled the accreditation of Sky News Arabia correspondents in Syria (06/19). Also, regime forces attacked a crew working for *Al-A'an* TV in the Aleppo Ming airport (06/15) and Egyptian authorities prevented Syrian filmmaker Nidal Al-Hassan from entering Egypt, at the request of the Syrian embassy in Cairo (06/10).

In **Jordan**, three violations were carried out against journalists in May 2013: the first one during a protest in front of the Israeli Embassy in Amman (05/15). Also, the Jordanian police prevented journalists from covering a sit-in organized by employees inside Amman's courthouse (05/07), and the *Roya* channel correspondent was prevented from covering a sit-in in front of the Embassy of Iraq (05/12).

In June, the Press and Publication Department (PPD) blocked 213 news websites (06/02), which raised a storm of protest led by the "Media Coalition against the Denial of Access to Websites and the Publications Law". Several protests took place in Jordan, especially before the Prime Minister's office and the country's main Internet service provider.



Additionally, the Jordanian Prime Minister ordered that the journalists be expelled from a meeting with the parliamentary committees on two occasions (06/04 and 06/11), and the participants in the “*Shad Al-Rihal Nahwa Al-Quds*” (Going to Jerusalem) festival expelled a journalist carrying *Al-Manar* TV’s microphone (06/07). Israeli authorities banned Jordanian journalist Walid Hosni from entering Palestine (06/09) and Jordanian security services prevented private media outlets from covering the meeting of between relatives of detainees in Israeli jails on the one hand and the Jordanian Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Kingdom’s ambassador to Tel Aviv on the other (06/17).

On a cultural level, Jordanian authorities censored scenes from the Swedish movie “Hamilton”, under the pretext that it contained sex dubbed “obscene” (06/06).

In the **Gaza Strip**, the Hamas police beat the journalists who were covering a sit-in in the city of Khan Younes, namely the *Al-Mayadeen* correspondent, Ahmad Ghneim, the channe’s cameraman, Abdel Aziz Al-Afifi, his assistant Odei Abu Shahme, as well as AFP’s photographer, Mohammad Al-Baba, and Palestine Today cameraman, Mohammad Taha (05/07). Also, the police prevented *Al-Kitab* TV correspondent and photographer from conducting an interview (05/08) and the internal security forces summoned writer Ibrahim Ibresh for questioning twice in four days (05/23).

In June, municipal policemen in Gaza and bodyguards of the city’s mayor arrested journalist Mohammad Othman, and assaulted him. They confiscated his camera and accused him of “taking secret photographs”, as he was heading to the Municipality headquarters on June 24, to solve a problem related to a piece of land belonging to his family. The next day, Osman went to the police station with a medical report and a man who witnessed the attack, to file a complaint against the bodyguards. The police contacted the aggressor, who came to the police station with two other policemen and threatened Othman once again.

In the **West Bank**, Israeli forces fired stun grenades at the *Anadolu* news agency correspondent, Moaz Meshaal causing him burns to his right leg (05/17). They also arrested journalist and activist Odei Hreibat (05/27) and the Israeli military court sentenced journalist Tarek Abu Zeid to three months in prison and released him 80 days later (05/02). In June, photojournalist Nasser Al-Shouyoukhi was hit by an Israeli rubber-coated bullet in the shoulder (06/05), Palestine TV reporter Ahmad Shawar and photographer Bashar Nazal were beaten and their cameras broken while covering the weekly protest in the Kfar Kadum village; the Israeli forces subsequently arrested them (06/21). Also, Israeli authorities prevented journalist Nawaf Al-Amer from traveling to Jordan without providing any explanation (06/06), and Jordanian singers Omar Al-Abdallat and Mays Shalash were banned from taking part in a festival in Palestine (06/28).

On the local front, Palestinian Security Services (PSS) held journalists Sary Arabi (05/13) and Mohammad Bisharat (05/19) for three days, as well as the *Kul Al-Nass* channel reporter, Salim Al-Salman, who was beaten during the questioning; he was released five days later (05/21). Also,



journalists Omar Abu Arqub and Harun Abu Orra were summoned and questioned for three consecutive days (05/12).

TV journalist Ruba Al-Najjar and the crew of her show “*Ayn ‘ala*” received death threats through a note posted on YouTube (05/09) and the security services found a bomb and a threat letter in front of one of the team members’ house (05/25).

Palestinian policemen assaulted photographers Shadi Hatem and Munzer Zahran, after they refused to delete photos, while covering riots that erupted following a volleyball game (06/07). Also, Radio Bethlehem 2000 director, Georges Qanawati, was arrested for two days, for “inciting sectarian strife”, after he published a press release on the station’s website (06/03). Palestinian Intelligence Services summoned journalist Alaa Al-Rimawi for questioning three times in one week (06/08).

In the **1948 Territories**, Israeli authorities continued their violations on the media and cultural scene. In May, the police beat journalists who were covering a sit-in for the “unification of Jerusalem”, and three of them were arrested (05/08). The police also assaulted journalists covering a sit-in in commemoration of the *Nakba* (05/15). Photographer Majd Gheith was injured by a stun grenade at the Damascus Gate (*Bab Al-Amud*) (05/18) and the police prevented journalists from entering the Al-Aqsa mosque (05/17). Policemen arrested members of the “Jerusalem Candles” band, to prevent them from participating in the Al-Issawiya festival (05/01) and Israeli security forces detained Palestinian singer Rim Banna for an hour at the Jordan River crossing (05/22).

In June, the Israeli police arrested journalist Saïd Al-Qaq after beating him (06/08). The *Ehna TV* and the persons in the charge of the *Al-Arez* production house were threatened following a report they published (06/14), and blogger Abir Copti was summoned for questioning on the basis of an article she had published (06/02). Also, singer Rim Banna was again held for questioning after she participated in an international aid convoy for refugees at the Syrian-Turkish border (06/10). The Israeli police closed down the *Al-Hakawati* Theater in Jerusalem for a week and forced the cancellation of the “Palestinian Child Festival” (06/21). Additionally, journalists were prevented from covering a meeting calling on Palestinians of the 1948 Territories to join the Israeli army (06/14).





Center for Media and Cultural Freedom

The detailed monthly reports for [May 2013](#) and [June 2013](#) (in Arabic) are available on the website of the **SKeys** Center for Media and Cultural Freedom.

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