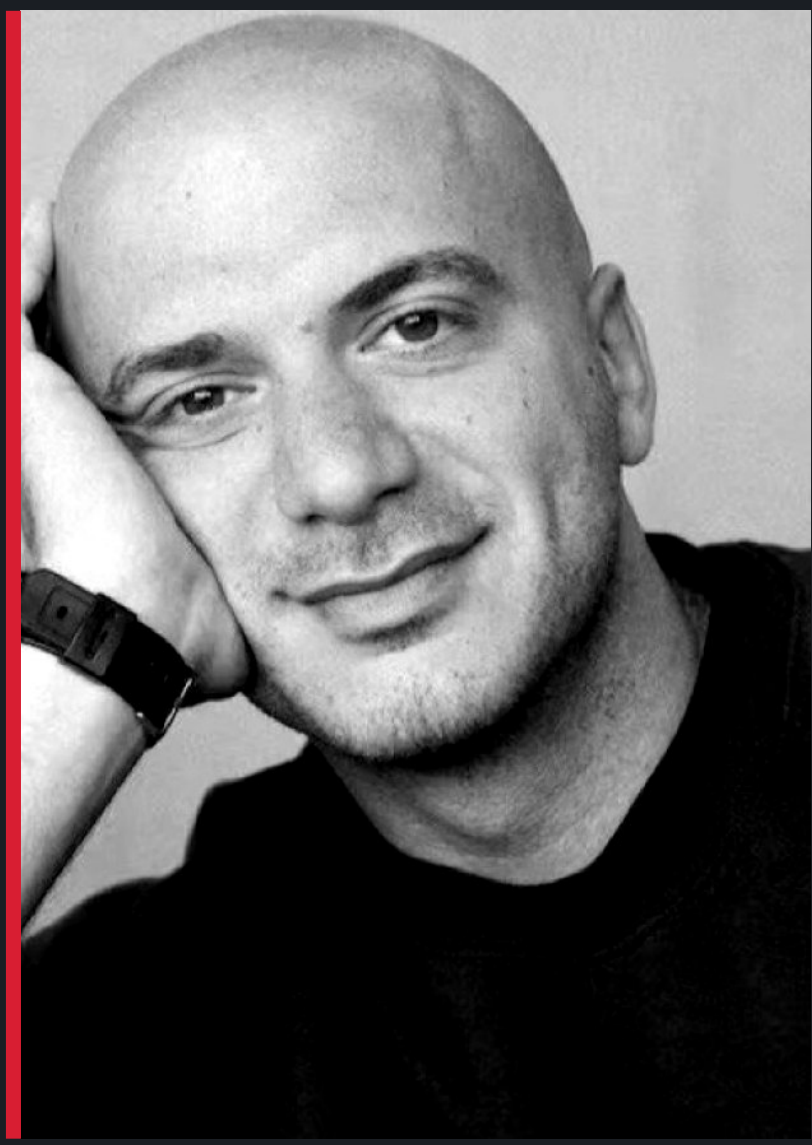


Advocacy dossier

Hassan Akkad

حسان عقاد

At liberty **Syria**

Hassan Akkad is a Syrian-British filmmaker and activist, twice detained in 2011, who returned to Damascus after December 2024 and campaigned for public figures to honour reconstruction pledges. He was detained for four days in June 2026 over a defamation complaint under the cybercrime law and is now free, with at least one complaint reported to remain open.

01
The case at a glance

Hassan Akkad is a Syrian-British filmmaker and activist, twice detained in 2011, who returned to Damascus after December 2024 and campaigned for public figures to honour reconstruction pledges. He was detained for four days in June 2026 over a defamation complaint under the cybercrime law and is now free, with at least one complaint reported to remain open.

Status	Arrested	Country
At liberty	**17 Jun 2026**	**Syria**

Charges: Insult, defamation and online slander under the cybercrime law (Legislative Decree No. 17 of 2012, amended by Law No. 20 of 2022); complaint by Mousa al-Omar withdrawn on 21 June 2026, other complaints reported pending

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Drop any charges that remain on record against Hassan Akkad in connection with peaceful human rights work.

02 Confirm publicly that Hassan Akkad faces no residual travel, financial, or professional restriction arising from this case.

03 Guarantee that Hassan Akkad can resume that work without surveillance, summons, or further reprisal.

04 Provide effective remedy for the period of deprivation of liberty already served.

02

How the case unfolded

2011

Arrest

Detained twice for documenting protests

Hassan Akkad, then an English teacher in Damascus, was detained twice by the security services in 2011 for filming and documenting anti-government protests. He was held for about two weeks on each occasion, the second time in solitary confinement.

2011

Torture

Tortured in detention

Akkad has said he was tortured during his first detention in 2011. The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre reports that he was tortured at Branch 215 of Military Intelligence.

2012

Departure into exile

Leaves Syria

After his release, Akkad left Syria and lived for several years in countries of the region, including Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates.

September 2015

Other act

Reaches the United Kingdom as a refugee

After an 87-day journey from Turkey across Europe, Akkad reached the United Kingdom in September 2015 and sought asylum. Footage he filmed on the journey was used in the BBC documentary series Exodus: Our Journey to Europe, which won a BAFTA award.

June 2026

Complaint filed

Further defamation complaints by other plaintiffs

The Damascus prosecutor said other plaintiffs had filed slander and defamation complaints against Akkad. The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre reports that two of these were filed by companies linked to the businessman Mohammad Hamsho, after Akkad published videos about pledges attributed to him.

3 June 2026

Complaint filed

Defamation complaint filed by Mousa al-Omar

Journalist and presenter Mousa al-Omar filed a complaint with the Public Prosecution accusing Akkad of insult, defamation and online slander, after Akkad questioned on social media whether al-Omar had honoured a reconstruction pledge. Al-Omar disputes Akkad's account. The complaint was referred to the cybercrime branch under the cybercrime law of 2012, as amended in 2022.

4 June 2026

Summons

Summoned by the cybercrime branch

Akkad was summoned by the cybercrime branch over the complaint. According to his campaign, he then paused his public commentary on the matter to allow the legal process to proceed. The Damascus prosecutor later said he had been notified several times and had not appeared, and that a search notice was issued against him.

6 June 2026

Threats and intimidation

Reports death threats and pauses publishing

Akkad said he had received death threats through social media and announced a temporary halt to publishing. He also reported that the Ministry of Information had asked him to stop publishing until a meeting at the ministry.

17 June 2026

Arrest

Arrested at a café in Damascus

At about 9:45pm, plainclothes officers, some armed and two masked according to his campaign, detained Akkad at a café in the al-Maliki district of Damascus, where he was with journalists and friends. They identified themselves as members of the cybercrime branch of the Criminal Security Directorate. According to AFP and his campaign, no arrest warrant was shown, and his lawyers said no legal basis was presented at the time.

19 June 2026

Investigation opened

Prosecutor confirms detention pending investigation

In a video published by the Damascus judiciary, Public Prosecutor Hossam Khattab confirmed the complaint of 3 June, the search notice and the detention on 17 June. He said Akkad was being held at the criminal investigation branch until his statement was recorded, before the preliminary investigation was referred to the competent court.

21 June 2026

Case closed or dropped

Mousa al-Omar withdraws his complaint

Mousa al-Omar said on X that his lawyer had dropped the personal claim and the lawsuit against Akkad that morning.

21 June 2026

Release

Released after four days in detention

Akkad was released after four days in detention and announced on Instagram that he was home. At the time of his release, the two complaints linked to companies of Mohammad Hamsho were still open, according to the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre.

03

The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: Hassan Akkad is free in Syria. He was released on 21 June 2026 after four days in detention, but at least one defamation complaint against him remained open, and in October 2026 the fact-checking platform Verify-Sy found that claims he had extorted two families were not supported by the documents in circulation.

Background and Work

Hassan Akkad is a Syrian filmmaker and activist from Damascus. Before 2011 he worked as an English teacher and photographer. When protests began in 2011 he took part in them and filmed them, and he was detained twice by the security services that year, for about two weeks each time. He has said he was tortured during the first detention and held in solitary confinement during the second. The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre reports that he was held at Branch 215 of Military Intelligence. He lost his teaching post.

Akkad left Syria and lived for several years in countries of the region before travelling from Turkey across Europe in 2015, a journey of 87 days that ended in the United Kingdom in September 2015, where he sought asylum. Footage he filmed on the journey appeared in the BBC series Exodus: Our Journey to Europe, which won the BAFTA for best factual series and an International Emmy in 2017. In 2020 he worked as a hospital cleaner in east London during the COVID-19 pandemic, and in May 2020 he published a video addressed to the Prime Minister about the exclusion of cleaners and care workers from a bereavement scheme for health workers, which the government extended the same day. He later became a British citizen.

After the fall of the Assad government in December 2024, Akkad returned to Damascus. In April 2026 he launched an online campaign, known in Arabic as «هاتوا الفلوس اللي عليكو» ("Give Us the Money That You Owe!"), which asked whether public pledges made during fundraising drives for Syria's reconstruction had been paid. The campaign addressed businessmen, media figures and officials, among them the journalist Mousa al-Omar and the businessman Mohammad Hamsho, who had been under United States and European Union sanctions and reached a settlement with the transitional authorities in early 2026.

The Case

On 3 June 2026 Mousa al-Omar filed a complaint with the Public Prosecution in Damascus accusing Akkad of insult, defamation and online slander, after Akkad questioned whether al-Omar had honoured a pledge. Al-Omar disputes Akkad's account and has said that all the money he pledged was paid. The complaint was referred to the cybercrime branch under Legislative Decree No. 17 of 2012, as amended by Law No. 20 of 2022. Akkad was summoned by the cybercrime branch on 4 June. He said he had received death threats on social media and paused his publishing. The Damascus prosecutor later said that Akkad had been notified several times and had not appeared, and that a search notice was issued against him. Other plaintiffs filed further defamation complaints; according to the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, two of them came from companies linked to

Mohammad Hamsho.

The Arrest

On the evening of 17 June 2026 plainclothes officers detained Akkad at a café in the al-Maliki district of Damascus. His campaign said five officers entered, some armed and two masked. They identified themselves as members of the cybercrime branch of the Criminal Security Directorate. According to AFP and his campaign, no arrest warrant was shown, and his lawyers said no legal basis was presented at the time. The human rights activist Celine Kasem, who was with him, criticised the use of a legal framework inherited from the previous government.

Detention Conditions and Health

Akkad was held at the criminal investigation branch in Damascus. Sources close to him told Verify-Sy that he was treated well in detention and was not subjected to physical harm, but that he objected to the loss of his liberty.

Legal Proceedings

In a video statement published by the Damascus judiciary, Public Prosecutor Hossam Khattab confirmed the complaint, the search notice and the detention, and said Akkad was held to complete the preliminary investigation before referral to the competent court. On 21 June 2026 al-Omar announced that his lawyer had withdrawn the complaint, and Akkad was released the same day after four days in detention. At the time of his release the two complaints linked to Hamsho's companies were still open, and Verify-Sy reported that one case remained pending. Their outcome has not been reported.

The case drew criticism of the continued use of the cybercrime law. The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre reports that the Ministry of Justice later issued a circular asking prosecutors to limit cybercrime arrest warrants to serious offences and to treat pretrial detention as an exception.

Akkad reported that Instagram suspended his account on 11 July 2026 after copyright notices that he says were used to silence him. From 1 October 2026 pages on Facebook and the website Zaman al-Wasl circulated claims that he had demanded money from two families in Hama and Aleppo to remove posts, and that a search warrant had been issued against him in Hama. Akkad denied the claims and said the Hama warrant had been cancelled after he gave his statement. On 5 October 2026 Verify-Sy rated the extortion claim false, noting that the documents showed complaints but no court ruling.

International Response

Mohammed al-Abdullah, director of the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, criticised the arrest and its basis in the cybercrime law of 2012. No statement by a United Nations body or an international human rights organisation on the case was found for this record.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/hassan-akkad/

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