

## **Private TV Channel Forced to Close Office**

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The Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression, a media pressure group, condemned the recent closing down of the offices of the private television station Orient TV in a July 29 statement carried by several opposition websites.

Security officials raided the channel's offices in Damascus late on July 28 and ordered staff to leave immediately, the statement said.

Two of the station's directors were questioned by security officers the next morning and 15 other officials from the channel were summoned for interrogation, the statement added.

Orient TV, which is owned by Syrian businessman Ghassan Aboud, is still broadcasting from the United Arab Emirates.

The channel, which airs news and youth programmes and discusses the status of minorities in Syria, started broadcasting in February and was licensed to operate in Syria.

The raid followed a statement by Aboud criticising Syria's political and media elites, according to unnamed official sources and channel employees quoted in the pressure group's statement.

The channel created job opportunities for young reporters and attracted a large audience because it presented information in a "creative" way that differed from the official style of journalism, the statement said.

In July, the website All4Syria reported that security services had put pressure on the majority of the station's employees to quit working for the channel.

The website said that authorities earlier this year closed the religious TV channel Al-Daawa only three months after it started broadcasting.

The channel's employees were subsequently forced to sign commitments not to work there again, the website said, adding that all the equipment and files of the channel were confiscated by security officials.

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