

Yemen

Despite a decline in armed conflict and cross-border attacks compared to previous years, all parties to the long-standing conflict in Yemen continued to commit unlawful attacks and killings with impunity. The internationally recognized government of Yemen and the Huthi de facto authorities, which control different parts of the country, continued to harass, threaten, arbitrarily detain, forcibly disappear and prosecute journalists and activists for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression. The Huthi de facto authorities forcibly disappeared members of the Baha'i religious minority for exercising their right to freedom of religion and belief. All parties to the conflict restricted delivery of humanitarian aid. The Huthi de facto authorities continued to ban women from travelling without a male guardian, restricting their ability to work or receive humanitarian aid. All parties failed to provide justice for victims of crimes under international law and human rights violations.

Background

While 2023 saw a decline in fighting and cross-border attacks, all parties to the conflict sporadically attacked civilian areas and frontlines in Ma'rib, Hodeidah, Ta'iz, Sa'adah, Al Jawf, Shabwa and Dhale' governorates.

In March, under the auspices of the UN, parties to the conflict agreed to release almost 900 conflict-related detainees. Between 14 and 16 April, the Saudi government and the internationally recognized government of Yemen, which is supported by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition, released 706 detainees, while the Huthi de facto authorities released 181, including four journalists on death row – Akram Al-Walidi, Abdelkhaleq Amran, Hareth Hamid and Tawfiq Al-Mansouri.¹ However, hundreds of other individuals remained unlawfully detained.²

Yemenis' access to food, safe drinking water, a healthy environment and adequate health services remained highly restricted. According to OCHA, the 2023 funding gap in the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan exacerbated food insecurity and jeopardized the humanitarian response, compelling aid organizations to scale back or close crucial humanitarian programmes.

On 31 October, the Huthi military spokesperson announced they had carried out four drone and missile attacks targeting Israel since 7 October, although none reached Israeli territory. On 27 October, one of the drones crashed near a hospital in Taba, Egypt, injuring six people.

Between November and December, the Huthi armed forces carried out around 24 attacks on commercial and military ships in the Red Sea. On 19 November, the Huthis seized the Galaxy Leader, a British owned and Japanese operated vehicles carrier and arbitrarily detained 25 of its crew members. Huthi officials vowed to continue the Red Sea maritime attacks until the Israeli military campaign in Gaza ends.

Unlawful attacks and killings

On 13 March, a drone strike allegedly launched by Huthi forces hit a field hospital in Hajar area, western Qa'atabah district in Dhale' governorate, reportedly injuring three civilians, including two health workers.

On 22 April, three civilians were killed, including a woman and a 12-year-old child, and a further nine were injured, all from the same family, when shells fired from a Huthi-controlled area hit houses in Al-Majash al-Ala area in Mawza district, Ta'iz governorate.

On 4 July, mortar fire injured five children aged between 8 and 12 while they were herding their goats on al-Jibalayn hill in al-Muharith village, Hodeidah governorate.

On 15 July, mortar fire killed two civilians and damaged their home in al-Aboos village, Ta'iz governorate, in an exchange of fire between government and Huthi forces.

Freedom of expression, religion and belief

Parties to the conflict continued to harass, threaten, arbitrarily detain, forcibly disappear and prosecute individuals for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression, religion and belief.

Huthi de facto authorities

On 25 May, Huthi security forces stormed a peaceful gathering of Baha'is, a religious minority, in the capital, Sana'a. They detained and forcibly disappeared 17 individuals, among them five women. Following international pressure, 11 were released.³ However, five men and one woman remained held at the Huthi-run security and intelligence detention centre in Hadda and Sana'a.

On 24 August, five armed men in civilian clothes physically assaulted journalist Mujalli al-Samadi in al-Safiyah neighbourhood of Sana'a and issued threats to stop him criticizing the Huthis. He reported the incident at the police station in al-Sab'ain district in Sana'a but the authorities failed to hold anyone to account. Mujalli al-Samadi's radio station, Sawt al Yemen, which the Huthis had shut down in January 2022, remained closed despite the Journalism and Publications Court in Sana'a ruling in July 2022 that the station was allowed to resume broadcasting.

The Huthi de facto authorities arbitrarily detained journalist Nabil al-Sidawi after 21 September, when he was due to be released after serving a prison sentence. Huthi security and intelligence services had detained him on 21 September 2015. Following a grossly unfair trial in 2022 by the Sana'a-based Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) – a court traditionally reserved for security-related crimes – he was sentenced to eight years in prison.

On 26 September, Huthi de facto authorities carried out a wave of arrests rounding up scores of largely peaceful demonstrators who had gathered to commemorate the anniversary of Yemen's September Revolution.⁴

Government of Yemen

On 11 July, the criminal investigation directorate in Ta'iz governorate summoned for investigation journalist Jamil al-Samit based on a complaint filed by Ta'iz military axis leadership after he published articles calling for the leadership to be replaced. He was arbitrarily detained for a day and then released. On 1 August, he was again summoned and interrogated by Ta'iz police, who accused him of jeopardizing the police's image in his articles. He was arbitrarily detained for five days and then released.

In August, security forces in Ma'rib city followed a media worker after he finished filming a news report in al-Hay'a street, then seized his camera and deleted the footage. They took him to a police station and only released him after he signed a pledge that he would not film in the city without prior approval from the security administration.

Southern Transitional Council

On 1 March, Security Belt forces, a paramilitary wing of the Southern Transitional Council (STC) that controls parts of south Yemen, stormed the Yemeni Journalists' Syndicate headquarters in Al Tawahi district, Aden governorate, confiscating property, expelling the journalists present and prohibiting them from accessing the building. The Security Belt forces then replaced the syndicates' sign with that of the STC-supported Southern Journalists and Media Workers Syndicate. On 28 March, the Yemeni Journalists' Syndicate filed a complaint before the public prosecutor in Aden to investigate the incident but no action was taken.

The STC de facto authorities continued to detain journalist Ahmad Maher who was arbitrarily arrested by Security Belt forces on 6 August 2022 in Dar Sa'ad district, Aden governorate. In September 2022, the criminal prosecution charged him with publishing fake and misleading news. From March 2023, the Specialized Criminal Court in Aden repeatedly adjourned his hearing.

Denial of humanitarian access

Parties to the conflict continued to restrict movement and the delivery of aid, including by imposing bureaucratic constraints such as delayed approvals, travel permit denials or delays, cancellation of humanitarian initiatives, and interference in the project design, implementation and assessment of humanitarian activities.

In May, Huthi de facto authorities issued a circular requiring humanitarian organizations to inform them every month about their media, advocacy and awareness-raising projects and activities and to apply for permits to implement them. The circular also required humanitarian organizations to provide their monthly media reports for review and sign-off by the Supreme Council, and to be accompanied by a media representative appointed by the Huthis during field operations.

Yemeni female humanitarian workers continued to struggle to conduct fieldwork in Huthi-controlled areas because of the *mahram* (male guardianship) requirement which restricted field visits and aid deliveries.

On 21 July, unknown gunmen shot dead World Food Programme staff member Muayad Hameidi in Al Turbah city, Ta'iz governorate.

On 11 August, five UN staff who had been abducted in February 2022 in Abyan governorate were released.

On 25 October, the Safety and Security Director at Save the Children, Hisham Al-Hakimi, died while being arbitrarily detained by the Huthis in Sana'a. He was detained on 9 September while off duty and was held incommunicado. Following his death, Save the Children suspended operations in northern Yemen for 10 days.

Women's and girls' rights

The Huthi de facto authorities continued to impose their *mahram* requirement restricting women's movement and banning them from travelling without a male guardian or evidence of their written approval within governorates under Huthi control or to other areas of Yemen. The restrictions made it difficult for women to work and impacted access to humanitarian aid for Yemeni women and girls.

Huthi de facto authorities continued to detain woman human rights defender Fatma al-Arwali and deny her a fair trial. On 31 July, she was charged with espionage, a capital offence, and her case was transferred to the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC).⁵ On 5 December, the SCC sentenced Fatma al-Arwali to death.

Right to truth, justice and reparation

Parties to the conflict failed to provide any justice for victims of crimes under international law and human rights violations during the long-standing conflict or to remedy the harm they inflicted on civilians.

On 26 July, over 40 Yemeni civil society organizations and victims' and survivor associations launched the Yemen Declaration for Justice and Reconciliation. The Declaration emphasized the need for a post-conflict justice process to actively and adequately address the grievances of the Yemeni people. It also laid out principles to guide the post-conflict justice process, which included a victim-centred approach, inclusivity, gender equality, truth and memorialization, redress and reparations, accountability, reconciliation, and the centring of human rights.

Right to a healthy environment

Extreme weather conditions across Yemen, including heavy rains and flooding, exacerbated internal displacement in areas that included Ma'rib, Ta'iz and Ibb governorates, and increased food and livelihood insecurity. Following April floods, at least 31 people died, 37 were injured and three were reported missing, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. According to the United Nations Population Fund, between January and August, climate-induced displacement affected 109,830 individuals. Yemen was listed as one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change, and one of the least prepared for its shocks, based on its ND-GAIN (the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative) index score.

The mismanagement of oil infrastructure in Shabwa governorate continued to pollute al-Rawda district. In August, further damage to the oil supply pipeline polluted large areas of agricultural land and groundwater sources in the Ghourayr area of the governorate.

On 11 August, the UN completed the transfer of oil from the FSO *Safer*, a decaying oil supertanker moored off Yemen's port city of Hodeidah in the Red Sea, into a replacement vessel. The transfer prevented a massive oil spill that would have resulted in an environmental and humanitarian catastrophe.
