

World Report 2017 - Yemen

The Saudi Arabia-led coalition's aerial and ground campaign against Houthi forces and forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh continued in 2016. The campaign began on March 26, 2015, in support of the government of President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi and has been [supported](#) by the [United States](#) and the [United Kingdom](#).

As of October 10, at least 4,125 civilians had been killed and 7,207 wounded since the start of the campaign, the majority by coalition airstrikes, according to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Dozens of coalition airstrikes indiscriminately or disproportionately killed and wounded thousands of civilians in violation of the laws of war. The coalition also used internationally banned cluster munitions.

Houthi and allied forces committed serious laws-of-war violations by laying banned antipersonnel landmines, mistreating detainees, and launching indiscriminate rockets into populated areas in Yemen and southern Saudi Arabia, killing hundreds of civilians.

Yemeni warring parties began peace talks in Kuwait in April, following a cessation of hostilities, but airstrikes and fighting on the ground continued. This latest round of peace talks broke down in August, subsequent efforts to bring the parties back to negotiations have failed, and coalition airstrikes and ground fighting continue.

None of the states' party to the conflict carried out meaningful investigations into their forces' alleged violations.

Airstrikes

Human Rights Watch has documented 58 apparently unlawful coalition airstrikes since the start of the campaign, which have killed nearly 800 civilians and hit homes, markets, hospitals, schools, civilian businesses, and mosques. Some attacks may amount to war crimes. These include [airstrikes](#) on a crowded market in northern Yemen on March 15 that killed 97 civilians, including 25 children, and another on a crowded funeral in Sanaa on October that killed over 100 civilians and wounded hundreds more.

Repeated coalition airstrikes on factories and other civilian economic structures raise serious concerns that the coalition deliberately sought to inflict damage to Yemen's limited production capacity. Human Rights Watch investigated 18 apparently unlawful strikes, some of which used US or UK-supplied weapons, on 14 civilian economic sites. The strikes killed 130 civilians and wounded 173 more. Following the attacks, many of the factories ended production and hundreds of workers lost their livelihoods.

Cluster Munitions

Human Rights Watch has documented the coalition using internationally banned cluster munitions in at least 16 attacks that targeted populated areas, killing and wounding dozens.

Human Rights Watch has identified six types of air-dropped and ground-launched cluster munitions in multiple locations in Yemen, including those produced in the US and Brazil. Amnesty International has further documented the use of UK-made cluster munitions.

In May, the Obama administration [suspended transfers of cluster munitions](#) to Saudi Arabia after reports of their use in civilian areas in Yemen. Textron, US-based manufacturer of the CBU-105, [announced](#) it would stop production of the weapon in August.

Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and other coalition states are not party to the 2008 [Convention on Cluster Munitions](#). At a meeting in Geneva on May 19, a Yemeni official [said](#) the Hadi-led government is considering ratifying the convention following use of the weapons in Yemen.

Landmines

Houthi and allied forces laid numerous landmines, including banned antipersonnel mines, in Yemen's southern and eastern governorates of [Aden](#), Abyan, Marib, Lahj, and Taizz since the beginning of the current conflict. Landmines have killed and wounded dozens of civilians, including children.

Human Rights Watch investigated the cases of five people maimed by antipersonnel mines in Taizz since March 2016, including one man trying to return home with his brother following months of displacement. Landmines killed at least 18 people and wounded over 39 in two districts in Taizz governorate between May 2015 and April 2016, according to a local nongovernmental organization (NGO). Medical professionals and Yemenis clearing mines told Human Rights Watch the actual number of mine victims is likely much higher. In June, one doctor said he had treated 50 people in Taizz who had one or more limbs amputated since April who he believed were injured by landmines.

Yemen suffers from a shortage of equipped and trained personnel who can systematically survey and clear mines and explosive remnants of war.

Indiscriminate Attacks

Before and since the coalition air campaign, Houthi and allied forces have used artillery rockets in indiscriminate attacks in the southern cities of Aden, Taizz, Lahj, and al-Dale'a.

Since March 2015, Human Rights Watch has documented seven indiscriminate attacks by Houthi and allied forces in [Aden](#) and [Taizz](#) that killed 139 people, including at least 8 children.

Shelling by the Houthi-aligned Popular Committees and army units loyal to former president Saleh was responsible for killing 475 civilians and wounding 1,121 between July 1, 2015, and June 30, 2016, [according](#) to the UN.

Houthis have also [launched](#) artillery rockets into the Najran and Jazan regions in southern Saudi Arabia. Saudi authorities said 29 civilians had been killed and 300 injured in Najran in August alone due to cross-border shelling, Reuters [reported](#).

Attacks on Health and Restrictions on Humanitarian Access

Human Rights Watch has documented numerous airstrikes that unlawfully [struck](#) or damaged [health facilities](#) in Yemen. On August 15, 2016, a Saudi-led coalition airstrike hit an Medecins Sans Frontiers, MSF-supported hospital in Hajja, killing 19 people, and the fourth on an MSF facility. Following the strike, the organization pulled its staff out of six hospitals in northern Yemen.

Houthi and allied forces engaged in military operations around Aden, Taizz, and other areas repeatedly exposed [hospitals](#), [patients](#) and health workers to unjustified risk.

According to OHCHR, as of 2016, over 600 health facilities have closed due to damage caused by the conflict, shortage of critical supplies and lack of health workers.

More than 80 percent of the country's total population – 20 million people – have been in need of humanitarian assistance. Parties to the conflict have continued to block or restrict critical relief supplies from reaching civilians.

Houthi and allied forces have [confiscated](#) food and medical supplies from civilians entering Taizz and blocked humanitarian assistance from reaching the city, contributing to the near collapse of the health system.

The coalition has imposed a naval blockade on Yemen, limiting the importation of vital goods like fuel, which is urgently [needed](#) to power generators to hospitals and pump water to civilian residences. In August 2016, the coalition [suspended](#) all commercial flights to Sanaa. This is “having serious implications for patients seeking urgent medical treatment abroad,” [according](#) to the UN.

Aid workers have been kidnapped, unlawfully detained, and killed while engaged in humanitarian operations in Yemen. Humanitarian agencies are frequently denied access to areas controlled by Houthi and Saleh-aligned forces.

Children and Armed Conflict

Among repeated violations against children by parties to the conflict, Human Rights Watch has [documented](#) 58 apparently unlawful coalition airstrikes that killed at least 192 children, and multiple airstrikes that struck or [damaged schools](#). The Houthis have also endangered schools and used child soldiers.

The UN secretary-general included the Houthis, government forces, pro-government militias, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and, for the first time, the Saudi Arabia-led coalition on his annual “[list of shame](#)” for grave violations against children during armed conflict.

The coalition was responsible for 60 percent of the 785 children killed and 1,168 children wounded, and nearly half of the 101 attacks on schools and hospitals, according to the report.

Houthi forces, government and pro-government forces, and other armed groups have used child soldiers, an estimated [one-third](#) of the fighters in Yemen. The UN found in 2015 that 72 percent of 762 verified cases of child recruitment were attributable to the Houthis, with an overall five-fold increase in recruitment of children and a shift towards forced or involuntary recruitment.

Under Yemeni law, 18 is the minimum age for military service. In 2014, the government signed a [UN action plan](#) to end the use of child soldiers. Without an effective government in place, the action plan has not been implemented.

On June 6, 2016, the UN secretary-general's office announced it was removing the Saudi-led coalition from its "list of shame," "pending the conclusions of [a] joint review" of the cases included in the report's text after the Saudi government apparently threatened to de-fund UN programs, which could have put children who depend on these programs at risk.

The US again placed Yemen on its list of countries to which arms sales are restricted by the US [Child Soldiers Prevention Act](#), although President Barack Obama granted Secretary of State John Kerry authority to restart aid to Yemen that would otherwise be prohibited by the law.

Terrorism and Counterterrorism

Both AQAP and armed groups loyal to the Islamic State (also known as ISIS) claimed responsibility for numerous suicide and other bombings that killed dozens of civilians.

The US continued its drone attacks on alleged AQAP militants and began to publish basic data related to the strikes. By November, the US reported it had conducted 28 drone strikes in Yemen, killing at least 80 people described as AQAP operatives. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, a media organization, [reported](#) the US had possibly conducted 11 more strikes over the same period.

Arbitrary Detention, Torture, and Enforced Disappearances

After Houthi and allied forces seized control of the capital, Sanaa in late 2014, they cracked down on dissent. Houthi authorities [closed](#) several dozen NGOs and barred human rights advocates from traveling. In March, Houthi officials [confiscated the passport](#) of prominent rights advocate Abdulrasheed al-Faqih, the second such travel ban the Houthis imposed on a rights advocate. By November, Al-Faqih's passport had yet to be returned.

Houthi and allied forces have committed enforced disappearances, tortured detainees, and arbitrarily detained numerous activists, journalists, tribal leaders, and political opponents. Since August 2014, Human Rights Watch has documented the Sanaa-based authorities' arbitrary or abusive detention of at least 61 people. In 2016, Human Rights Watch documented two deaths in custody and 11 cases of alleged torture or other ill-treatment, including the abuse of a child.

Women's Rights, Sexual Orientation, and Gender Identity

Women in Yemen face severe discrimination in law and practice. They cannot marry without the permission of their male guardian and do not have equal rights to divorce, inheritance, or child custody. Lack of legal protection leaves them exposed to domestic and sexual violence. In the absence of a functioning government, no advances were made to pass a draft constitution that includes provisions guaranteeing equality and prohibiting discrimination based on gender, and a draft Child Rights Law that would criminalize child marriage and female genital mutilation. Forced marriage rates have increased during the ongoing conflict, according to UNFPA.

Under the 1994 penal code, same-sex relations are outlawed with punishments ranging from 100 lashes to death by stoning.

Accountability

None of the warring parties carried out credible investigations into their forces' alleged laws-of-war violations in Yemen.

The coalition-appointed Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT) concluded initial investigations into nine allegedly unlawful strikes. JIAT's results differed drastically from those of the UN, Human Rights Watch and others who documented some of the same strikes. JIAT did not release full investigation reports nor detailed information on their members, their methodology, including how they determine which strikes to investigate, or whether or not they have the power to ensure prosecutions of individuals responsible for alleged war crimes.

The US is not known to have conducted investigations into any alleged unlawful strikes in which its forces may have taken part.

In August, the UN high commissioner for human rights recommended establishing an independent, international mechanism to investigate alleged abuses by all sides in Yemen, finding the coalition-backed Yemeni National Commission was "unable to implement its mandate in accordance with international standards." Three UK parliamentary committees called on the UK to support an independent international inquiry "as a matter of urgency" in September.

In September, the UN Human Rights Council passed a resolution laying out two complementary processes for investigations, through the OHCHR itself, strengthened by the allocation of additional human rights experts, and through the Yemeni National Commission with OHCHR support.

Key International Actors

The US has been a party to the conflict since the first months of fighting, providing targeting intelligence and in-air refuelling. In May, the US said it had [deployed](#) some troops in Yemen to aid the United Arab Emirates and its own campaign against AQAP. In October, the US responded to Houthi missile launches, which the Houthis later denied, against US warships with multiple strikes at Houthi-radar sites.

The UK was "providing technical support, precision-guided weapons and exchanging information with the Saudi Arabian armed forces," according to the UK Ministry of Defence. The UK also prepared first drafts of all UN Security Council resolutions on Yemen. The Security Council issued resolutions on the crisis in February and April 2015.

Foreign governments have continued to sell weapons to Saudi Arabia, despite growing evidence the coalition has been committing unlawful airstrikes. US and UK lawmakers, whose governments altogether [approved](#) more than \$20 billion and \$4 billion worth of weapons sales, respectively to Saudi Arabia in 2015 alone, have increasingly challenged the continuation of these sales. Human Rights Watch called on all countries selling arms to Saudi Arabia to [suspend](#) weapons sales until it curtails its unlawful airstrikes in Yemen and credibly investigates alleged violations.

On February 25, the European parliament passed a resolution calling on the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini "to launch an initiative aimed at imposing an EU arms embargo against Saudi Arabia" due to its conduct in Yemen.