

World Report 2016 - Yemen

In January 2015, Houthi forces, also known as Ansar Allah, effectively ousted Yemeni President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi and his cabinet; he subsequently [relocated to Saudi Arabia](#) and re-established a government there.

In March, after [Houthi](#) and allied forces advanced south, threatening the port city of Aden, a Saudi Arabia-led coalition of Arab countries, with the participation of the United States, began a campaign of airstrikes against them. On March 26, coalition warplanes attacked Houthi forces in Sanaa, the capital, and other locations. The airstrikes continued throughout 2015 as fighting occurred across the country, with Bahrain, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates sending [ground troops](#) to battle Houthi and allied forces.

Dozens of coalition airstrikes were indiscriminate, violating the laws of war and killing and wounding thousands of civilians. The coalition also used cluster munitions, banned by international treaty. Houthi forces also committed serious laws-of-war violations by firing indiscriminate rockets into southern cities and Saudi Arabia, killing dozens of civilians.

They also laid banned antipersonnel mines in eastern and southern Yemen before withdrawing. Southern forces, supported by the Saudi-led coalition, also committed serious abuses, executing Houthi prisoners in Aden. None of the warring parties carried out meaningful investigations into their forces' alleged violations.

Airstrikes

Human Rights Watch documented dozens of coalition airstrikes that appear to have been unlawfully indiscriminate, causing civilian casualties, some of which may have amounted to war crimes. They include a March 30 [airstrike](#) on a camp for internally displaced persons near Yemen's border with Saudi Arabia that killed at least 29 civilians; a March 31 [airstrike](#) on a dairy factory outside Hodaïda that killed at least 31 civilians; a May 12 airstrike on a market and neighboring lemon grove in the town of Zabid, south of Hodaïda, killing at least 60 civilians; a July 4, airstrike on a village market in Muthalith Ahim, south of the Saudi border, killing at least 65 people; and a July 24 [airstrike](#) on homes in the port city of Mokha that killed at least 65 civilians.

In the Houthi's northern stronghold of Saada, Human Rights Watch [examined](#) a dozen coalition airstrikes that destroyed or damaged homes, five markets, a school, and a gas station, but found no evidence of military targets. The strikes [killed](#) 59 people, all reportedly civilians, including at least 35 children, between April 6 and May 11.

Cluster Munitions

Human Rights Watch [documented](#) the use by coalition forces of three types of cluster munitions in Yemen in 2015, while Amnesty International documented the coalition's use of a fourth type of cluster munition in November 2015. A fifth type of cluster munition has been used, but the actor responsible is unclear. Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and other coalition states are not party to the 2008 [Convention on Cluster Munitions](#).

In May, following Human Rights Watch's second report on the use of CBU-105 sensor fuzed weapons in Saada, the Saudi military acknowledged that coalition forces had used the weapon.

In August, the Saudi military responded to a new Human Rights Watch report that documented the coalition's use of M26 cluster munition rockets at least seven times in Hajja governorate, killing or wounding at least 35 civilians. A Saudi coalition spokesperson denied use of the M26 cluster munition rockets.

In August, a US Defense Department official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told media that "the US is aware that Saudi Arabia has used cluster munitions in Yemen."

The United Nations, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and more than 15 governments have condemned the use of cluster munitions in Yemen, as did the European Parliament in a July 9 [resolution](#).

Landmines

Houthi forces laid numerous [landmines](#), including banned antipersonnel mines in Yemen's southern and eastern governorates of Abyan, Aden, Marib, Lahj and Taizz since July. Landmines and explosive remnants of war killed at least 23 people and wounded others, including two deminers, according to Yemeni mine clearance officials, medical professionals, and media reports.

Antivehicle mines accounted for nine of those killed and five injured, although whether the mine is antivehicle or antipersonnel is often not detailed in reporting. Human Rights Watch believes that the actual number of mine victims in Yemen may be much higher.

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 Taizz, Lahj, al-Dale'a, and Aden, killing dozens of civilians. Houthis have also launched artillery rockets into the southern Saudi Arabian border city of Najran and areas of Jizan province.

Attacks on Health and Humanitarian Workers

During 2015, at least [three](#) ICRC [staff](#) and [two](#) Yemen Red Crescent Society (YRCS) staff were killed while engaged in humanitarian operations. On July 31, the British Red Cross [reported](#) that a wounded patient died when a YRCS ambulance came under fire in Taizz.

Houthi and allied forces engaged in military operations around Aden, Taizz, and other areas and opposing Southern forces repeatedly exposed [hospitals](#), [patients](#), and health workers to unjustified risk. In one [case](#) in Aden, Southern forces sought cover in a hospital, putting its staff and patients in jeopardy. At least two civilians died and a nurse was wounded.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as of September 2015, at least 160 health facilities had closed due to insecurity caused by the conflict.

In at least [four instances](#), Houthi forces unlawfully [detained](#) aid workers attempting to deliver medical supplies to healthcare facilities.

Children and Armed Conflict

In 2015, the Houthis and other armed groups, including tribal and Islamist militias such as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), [increased](#) their recruitment, training, and deployment of children. [According to UNICEF](#), by August 2015, armed groups had recruited 377 children, more than double those they recruited in 2014. At least 398 children were [killed](#) and 605 wounded between late March and August as a result of the fighting in the country.

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.

In September, the Yemen Sanctions Committee and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict held informal joint consultations on the conflict in Yemen.

According to [OCHA](#), as of September 18, approximately 140 schools had been destroyed, and another 390 damaged by the fighting. In August 2015, UNICEF estimated that at least 3,600 schools were closed, affecting 1.8 million children.

Terrorism and Counterterrorism

Both AQAP and armed groups loyal to the armed extremist group Islamic State (also known as ISIS) claimed responsibility for numerous suicide and other bombings that killed dozens of civilians. AQAP claimed responsibility for the January 7 attack that killed 11 people associated with the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris.

On December 6, 2014, two hostages held by AQAP were killed during a rescue effort by US special forces in southeastern Shabwa governorate.

The US continued its drone attacks on alleged AQAP members; independent research groups reported 15 to 20 strikes by mid-November. AQAP confirmed that a strike on June 12 killed its leader Nasir al-Wuhayshi.

The US remained unwilling to publish basic data related to the drone strikes, including the number of civilian casualties and information on unlawful strikes. Research groups estimate the strikes—one in 2002 and at least 210 since 2009—have killed 700 people. It is not known how many were in violation of international law. On June 8, a Yemeni citizen filed a lawsuit in US federal court seeking formal US acknowledgement that a US drone strike in August 2012 killed two of his relatives, including a cleric who preached against AQAP. The suit sought an apology but no compensation.

Harassment of Critics

After Houthi and allied forces seized control of Sanaa, they cracked down on dissent. Between January 25 and February 11, these forces beat peaceful protesters against the takeover with sticks and rifle butts. They arbitrarily detained at least 46 protesters, some for 13 days.

On February 8, Yemen's Interior Ministry ordered Sanaa police to prevent all unauthorized demonstrations due to "the exceptional circumstances" in Yemen, and on February 11, the Houthis detained three men attempting to join a protest and tortured them, in one case to death.

The Houthis arbitrarily detained [activists](#), [tribal leaders](#), and [political opponents](#) incommunicado for months. They also committed enforced disappearances.

The Houthis also targeted critical journalists. The Freedom Foundation, a Yemeni group that monitors press freedom, [reported](#) at least 49 attacks on media in January 2015 alone, while the Yemeni Journalists' Syndicate [reported](#) that Houthi forces beat at least 10 journalists, cameramen, and photographers as they covered the January and February 2015 protests, arbitrarily detaining seven and seizing or smashing equipment. Human Rights Watch [documented](#) seven attacks on media in early 2015.

In May, Houthi forces arbitrarily [detained](#) Abdullah Qabil and Yousef al-Ayzari, journalists who had criticized the Houthis. Both journalists died when a coalition airstrike hit the building in Dhamar where they were detained.

Women's and Girls' Rights

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.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Yemen's penal code prohibits same-sex relations. Sex between women is punishable by up to three years in prison and 100 lashes, while sex between men is punishable by whipping, imprisonment, and death by stoning.

Key International Actors

The United Kingdom is responsible for preparing first drafts of all United Nations Security Council resolutions on Yemen. The Security Council issued resolutions on the crisis in February and April 2015. In September 2015, UK International Development Secretary Justine Greening warned that "the lack of international action on the crisis in Yemen shows worrying parallels with the delayed response to the famine in Somalia."

In September, the high commissioner for human rights recommended establishing an independent, international, and impartial mechanism to investigate alleged abuses committed in Yemen. In a joint

statement in September, the UN special advisor on the prevention of genocide and the UN special advisor on the responsibility to protect issued a joint statement that endorsed the high commissioner's conclusion and underscored the "urgent need to establish credible and independent investigations" to hold perpetrators accountable and secure reparations for victims.

Reporting to the Human Rights Council in September, the high commissioner for human rights [recommended](#) the "establishment of an independent, international, and impartial mechanism to investigate alleged violations" committed in Yemen. Yemen responded by announcing the creation of a purely domestic mechanism.

An initial draft resolution presented by the Netherlands would have requested the OHCHR dispatch a mission to monitor and report on violations. The Dutch text was withdrawn in the face of a competing draft, presented by Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Arab Group, together with Yemen, which merely requests that the high commissioner provide "technical assistance" and assist the national commission of inquiry in meeting international standards. The Arab Group text was adopted by consensus.

The high commissioner is requested to report to the council in March and September 2016, and a number of states highlighted that the council should remain ready to press for a greater international investigative role if civilian casualties continue and the national process is inadequate.