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All parties to the conflict in Yemen continued to commit violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses with impunity. The Saudi Arabia-led coalition, supporting the internationally recognized Yemeni government, and Huthi forces continued to carry out attacks that unlawfully killed and injured civilians and destroyed civilian objects. All parties to the conflict carried out arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, harassment, torture and other ill-treatment, and unfair trials of individuals, targeted solely for their political, religious or professional affiliations, or for their peaceful activism. The parties to the conflict impeded the flow of life-saving goods, including food, medicine and fuel, and Huthi forces continued to impose arbitrary restrictions on humanitarian aid agencies. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic put further pressure on an already depleted health care system, which had only 50% of its hospitals and health care facilities still operating, as compared to 2016. Additionally, a 50% drop in the humanitarian response fund compared to 2019 further compounded the effects of the pandemic on what was left of the health system, increased food insecurity and limited access to clean water, sanitation and public health. People with disabilities and migrant workers were impacted disproportionately by the combined effects of the conflict and the pandemic. Death sentences were handed down for a wide range of crimes, and executions were carried out.

Background

In December, the internationally recognized Yemeni government reported that the number of COVID-19 cases had reached 2,078, namely in Hadramawt, Aden, Ta'iz, Lahij, Abyan, Almahra, Aldal'a, Ma'arib and Shabwa governorates. Meanwhile, the Huthi de facto authorities reported only a handful of cases in northern Yemen. The UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator estimated in June that there were possibly up to 1 million people affected by the virus in the country, with a fatality rate as high as 25%, five times the global average. According to the UN, health workers, including those working on the front line responding to COVID-19, were significantly impacted by the almost 50% reduction in aid. The UN estimated that this would result in: the closure of water and sanitation programmes serving 4 million people; 5 million children going without routine vaccinations; and the closure of malnutrition programmes and other wider health programmes serving 19 million people.

The armed conflict continued throughout 2020, with attacks by parties to the conflict escalating, including in Ma'arib, al-Jawf, al-Bayda, Dahle', Hodeidah, Abyan and Shabwa governorates.

The UN Secretary-General's call in March for an immediate global and humanitarian ceasefire to end hostilities and counter COVID-19 was welcomed by all parties to the conflict except the Huthi forces, who refused to participate. The UN Special Envoy for Yemen pursued negotiations with parties to the conflict, and in September a draft joint declaration was submitted, including guidelines for a nationwide ceasefire, humanitarian measures and engagement in the political process.

In April, the Southern Transitional Council (STC), backed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), declared "self-rule" in areas under its control in the south of the country, after withdrawing from the Saudi-brokered peace deal reached in 2019 between the STC and the internationally recognized Yemeni government. Talks subsequently resumed, during which the STC abandoned its declaration of self-administration. On 18 December, a new power-sharing cabinet was formed as part of the Riyadh agreement headed by Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed.

The UAE announced the completion of its phased military withdrawal from Yemen. However, it continued to illicitly divert weapons and military equipment to militias in Yemen and carried out air strikes.

Unlawful attacks and killings

All parties to the conflict continued to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law with impunity, including indiscriminate attacks which killed and injured civilians and destroyed and damaged civilian objects.

Huthi forces used imprecise weapons in populated areas, placed internationally banned anti-personnel mines in farmland, wells and villages, and shelled indiscriminately, causing hundreds of civilian casualties. In March, indiscriminate attacks by Huthi forces hit al-Thawra hospital, the largest public hospital in Ta'iz city and in April, the Central Prison in Ta'iz, killing five women and a child, and injuring at least 11 civilians.

On 30 December, Aden's airport was attacked shortly after members of the new government from Riyadh arrived in the city of Aden. The attack killed 26 individuals, including aid workers, and injured 50 others but there were no casualties among cabinet members. The Huthi de facto authority did not claim responsibility.

The Saudi-led coalition carried out multiple air strikes in the north, killing at least 49 civilians, including six children, between June and August. The UN Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen determined that these incidents warranted further investigation, noting that the high number of civilian casualties raised questions around the proportionality of the attacks and whether the Saudi Arabia-led coalition took all necessary measures to protect civilians and minimize casualties. In August, an air strike hit a community college used by Huthi forces as a detention facility and killed 134 detainees and injured 40 others.

In July, the UK government resumed issuing licences for arms sales to Saudi Arabia, reversing a 2019 decision, saying "there is not a clear risk that the export of arms and military equipment to Saudi Arabia might be used in the commission of a serious violation of international humanitarian law."

Freedoms of expression and association

All parties to the conflict continued to suppress freedom of expression and association through arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, harassment, torture and other ill-treatment, and unfair trials. In October the UN Special Envoy for Yemen reported the release of 1,000 prisoners, a very low number given the scale and pattern of enforced disappearance and detention cases in the country.

In March, Mahdi al-Mashat, head of the Sana'a-based Supreme Political Council of Yemen, the executive body set up by the Huthis, announced the release of all Baha'i political prisoners.¹ Four months later, six people of the Baha'i faith, including Hamid Haydara, who had been detained since 2013, were released.

In April, the Huthi-run Specialized Criminal Court sentenced four journalists to death after a deeply flawed trial based on trumped-up charges. The same month, the Court announced the release of six other journalists, including Salah al-Qaedi, who had been sentenced to three years of house arrest. The 10 journalists had been detained for five years without charge or trial.²

Cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment

Conditions in prisons and detention centres, including overcrowding, lack of access to health care and poor sanitation and hygiene, combined with the spread of COVID-19, exposed detainees to substantial health risks. The Yemeni authorities failed to take measures to protect detainees and curb the spread of the virus in prisons and detention centres by providing masks or other hygiene products.

Tawfiq al-Mansouri remained on death row as one of four journalists sentenced to death in 2020. He suffers from chronic illness including diabetes, kidney failure, heart problems, prostate inflammation and asthma, and in June he contracted COVID-19. The Huthi de facto authorities continued to deny him life-saving medical treatment despite his critical health condition.³

All parties to the conflict continued to detain and torture hundreds of individuals targeted solely for their political, religious or professional affiliations or for their peaceful activism. Parties to the conflict also targeted journalists and human rights defenders, many since 2016. Detainees were held in unofficial detention centres and in dangerous conditions. For example, in Aden, the UAE-backed STC held detainees in a tin building and an underground cellar in Al Jala camp. According to the organization Mwatana for Human Rights, at least 13 people were arbitrarily detained in Al Jala camp and 17 were tortured between May 2016 and April 2020.

According to the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen, the internationally recognized Yemeni government was responsible for ill-treatment, sometimes amounting to torture, of detainees in Ma'rib political security prison, including beatings, electric shocks and burning of genitals, threats of sterilization, and forcing detainees to crawl on broken glass.

Denial of humanitarian access

The COVID-19 pandemic in Yemen challenged an already fragile health care system. Compounded by a funding shortage, a blockade, obstruction of aid and a fuel crisis, hospitals lacked the means to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak leading to the resignation of health workers, hospital closures

and the wide spread of the disease among the population. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs warned that the response to the pandemic and other diseases would cease in several governorates, affecting 18 million people, including 6 million children.

All parties to the conflict impeded access to humanitarian aid. According to the UN, in 2020 approximately 80% of the population were in need of humanitarian aid and protection – with limited access to health care or clean water – and 20 million people were food insecure.

Parties to the conflict increased bureaucratic restrictions and interfered in aid projects, including blocking needs assessments. The escalation of fighting further restricted freedom of movement, impeding the delivery of aid.

In March, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), suspended US\$73 million of the US\$85 million pledged to NGOs who were delivering aid to Huthi-controlled areas.

In May, Huthi forces blocked containers belonging to the WHO and shipments of personal protective equipment (PPE) for the COVID-19 response.

In September, the UN Special Envoy for Yemen warned that FSO Safer, an oil tanker moored near the port of Hodeidah, could explode or spill more than 1 million barrels of oil into the Red Sea, threatening an environmental, economic and humanitarian catastrophe. An agreement was reached in November between the Huthi de facto authorities and UN. The de facto authorities allowed access to UN experts to assess the oil tanker and the UN mission team was expected to arrive on site by mid-February 2021.

Discrimination people with disabilities

People with disabilities continued to face exclusion, inequality and violence, largely arising from the systematic failure of the Yemeni authorities, humanitarian organizations and donor states to guarantee their rights and respond to their needs.

The conflict further impoverished people with disabilities, and resulted in the complete loss of the limited social security support they once received. People with disabilities also lacked access to information on the prevention of and protection from COVID-19, but no data specific to people with disabilities was gathered to determine the scale.

Migrants

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened the already precarious situation of migrants in Yemen, who faced ongoing discrimination, stigmatization, forcible expulsion and abuse, including sexual violence.

Huthi forces detained migrants in poor conditions and denied them access to protection and asylum processes. When the pandemic spread, the Huthi authorities expelled thousands of migrants to Saudi Arabia, where they were detained in life-threatening conditions pending their repatriation.⁴

Death penalty

The death penalty remained in force for many offences, and the authorities continued to use it as a way to silence dissent. Executions were carried out by all parties to the conflict. The Huthi-run Specialized Criminal Court sentenced individuals to death in their absence for treason.

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1. [Yemen: Huthi authorities' decision to release Baha'i prisoners is 'positive signal' \(Press release, 26 March\)](#)
 2. [Yemen: Huthis must end use of judicial system to silence dissent \(Public statement, 25 March\)](#)
 3. [Yemen: Journalist on death row denied medical treatment \(Press release 7 December\)](#)
 4. [Saudi Arabia: 'This is worse than COVID-19': Ethiopians abandoned and abused in Saudi prisons \(MDE 23/3125/2020\)](#)



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