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Human Rights and Democracy Report 2016 - CHAPTER VI: Human Rights Priority Countries - Yemen

The human rights situation in Yemen remained deeply concerning throughout 2016. The internationally recognised Government of Yemen (GoY) does not control the entirety of Yemeni territory. This severely limited its ability to protect human rights and tackle abuses by non-state actors in areas outside its control. In addition, GoY and non-state actors, particularly the de facto authorities in northern Yemen, were responsible for a vast number of human rights abuses.

The ongoing conflict has hindered efforts to protect human rights. It has led to over 12,000 civilian casualties, the internal displacement of over two million people and a wide range of protection concerns for conflict-affected populations. The rights of women and children have been particularly affected, including a significant deterioration in gender relations. There is a lack of basic services, livelihood opportunities and effective rule of law. Attacks on hospitals and schools have also limited the right of access to healthcare and education.

In areas under government control, there were reports of human rights violations by state actors or actors affiliated to the government. These included arbitrary detention; forced displacement; and discrimination against minorities. There were a few reports of torture in correctional facilities. There were also allegations of breaches of international humanitarian law by GoY or GoY-affiliated actors, notably the indiscriminate use of weaponry in residential and commercial areas, resulting in civilian casualties.

In 2016, the number of human rights abuses by non-state actors, particularly the de facto authorities in northern Yemen, remained a cause for significant concern. Abuses recorded by the UN and NGOs included: increasing recruitment and use of child soldiers; restrictions on freedom of movement and expression, including the arbitrary closure of news outlets and civil society organisations, as well as physical attacks on journalists and human rights defenders; discrimination against minorities; and arbitrary detention.

Across Yemen, there were reports of sexual violence, some related to the conflict. Some NGOs also reported incidences of modern slavery – notably forced labour and domestic servitude.

In 2016, the UK remained at the forefront of international efforts to end the conflict and re-establish the authority of the legitimate Government of Yemen, which will provide the conditions necessary for the state to improve its

human rights performance. Within the constraints of the current conflict, the UK's main human rights objectives were to encourage the protection of civilians, including the protection of women's and children's rights.

The UK helped to negotiate and agreed a UN Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution adopted in September 2016. The resolution called on the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to provide additional human rights experts to the Yemen Office, in order to support the Yemeni National Independent Commission of Inquiry in investigating alleged human rights abuses.

Through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, the UK supported a UN Women project that encourages women's equal participation in the peace process, and more widely. The Department for International Development (DFID) has committed over £100 million in humanitarian aid to Yemen for 2016/17, including programmes supporting Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and the protection of civilians. All programmes address the differing needs of women, men, boys and girls.

The UK's priority for 2017 will remain progress towards a durable ceasefire and an inclusive political solution to the conflict, to prevent further conflict-related abuses and enable the Yemeni authorities to resume work protecting human rights. While the conflict continues, we will continue to urge all parties to protect civilians. The UK will work with the OHCHR to increase the capacity of Yemeni bodies to investigate and prevent human rights abuses.

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