



Human Rights and Democracy Report 2015 - Human Rights Priority Country update report: January to June 2016

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Human rights abuses in Yemen continued on a large scale in the first half of 2016, including: intense conflict affecting the civilian population; the use of child soldiers; attacks on journalists and human rights defenders; intimidation of humanitarian workers; arbitrary detentions; and destruction of civilian infrastructure. There continues to be ongoing violence across Yemen albeit at a reduced level since the 10 April Cessation of Hostilities (CoH). Yemen is still considered a Level Three Emergency by the UN, making Yemen one of the 4 most severe, large-scale humanitarian crises in the world. The scale of humanitarian need in Yemen is vast, with 21.2m people – 80% of the population – in need of humanitarian assistance, [according to the UN](#).

The conflict has had a significant impact on civilians. The [International Committee of the Red Cross \(ICRC\) has warned](#) that civilian suffering in Yemen had reached “unprecedented levels”. Since the beginning of the current conflict, [the UN report](#) that approximately 3,539 civilians have been killed, and 6,268 injured. Approximately 2.8m people have been affected by internal displacement, 7m are facing severe food shortages, and 14.1m require access to health services. Early in 2016, air strikes continued to cause significant civilian casualties, including children.

Yemeni civil society’s ability to contribute to the upholding of human rights remains a challenge in the current context. Recognising the deteriorating human rights situation, the UK continues to support a UN Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution adopted in October 2015, which called on the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to provide technical assistance to the government of Yemen, and assist a Yemeni National Independent Commission of Inquiry. The Commission is scheduled to report back to the HRC in September. We engage with both the government and the Houthi rebels to encourage them to respect human rights in Yemen.

Conflict in Yemen has continued in 2016. Since the introduction of the CoH, air strikes have reduced but ground fighting has continued. We have seen worrying incidents of offensives and provocation, including the shelling of civilian populated areas in Taiz by Houthi militias. The Houthis remain in control of large parts of the country, including Sana’a. However, the government of Yemen and Coalition forces are now in control of eastern and southern areas of the country, including Aden and Al Mukalla in the south. The city of Taiz remains highly contested but is under Houthi siege, and the humanitarian situation is dire.

UN-facilitated peace talks began in Kuwait on 21 April between the government and Houthi/ex-President Saleh supporters in the General People's Congress. These talks are ongoing, we have seen gradual progress, but there remain clear differences in the positions of both sides. The UK continues to support the UN-led peace process both politically and financially (£1.05m over 2 financial years), recognising that a political solution is the best way to end the conflict and bring long-term stability to Yemen.

We will fund a £400k project with UN Women, beginning in May 2016, which will directly support the work of the "Yemeni Women Pact for Peace and Security". This will provide training to participants in order to increase their ability to influence the peace process, and facilitate dialogue between women from the Pact and those involved in peace talks and subsequent political dialogue.

The UK continued to support the Saudi Arabian-led Coalition military action, which has a clear and lawful basis in response to President Hadi's request. Saudi Arabia has stated that major combat operations in Yemen are coming to an end. The UK has emphasised repeatedly with all parties, throughout the conflict, the importance of complying with international humanitarian law (IHL), and of protecting civilians. The UK has urged the Saudi Arabian government, and other members of the Coalition, to conduct thorough and credible investigations into alleged violations of IHL. There have been a number of reports by NGOs, including Amnesty and Human Rights Watch, and a UN Panel of Experts detailing the allegations of breaches in IHL by all sides to the conflict.

Civilians were also the victims of heinous terrorist attacks in Yemen. For example, in March, 4 nuns and 12 civilians were killed in a gun attack on a home for the elderly. Also in March, 3 suicide bombs reportedly struck Aden resulting in over 20 casualties. In May, suicide bombers killed at least 45 government of Yemen military recruits in Aden. In June, 3 co-ordinated bomb attacks took place in Al Mukalla, killing 38 Yemeni government forces.

The conflict has significantly impacted education, with Save the Children and the [UN International Children's Emergency Fund \(UNICEF\) reporting](#) that 1.8 million children have had their education interrupted, and that more than 1,600 schools are still closed because of damage or insecurity. The UK is funding the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF and Save the Children to monitor, support and refer displaced children, to provide children with food, nutritional support, water and sanitation, and to raise awareness of child rights. The UK also supports education in Yemen through the Social Fund for Development (SFD), which reconstructs and rehabilitates schools, as well as training education staff. Since 2010, more than 240,000 children in Yemen have attended schools supported by the SFD.

The security situation in Yemen is impacting the ability of humanitarian organisations to access populations to deliver assistance, and to make assessments of their needs. In spite of the CoH, there were ongoing challenges to the delivery of humanitarian assistance and movement of humanitarian personnel on the ground. Bureaucratic impediments, including a lack of clearance or delays in approving missions, assessments and ground movements of relief consignments, significantly hindered access. Risks to the humanitarian community remain unacceptably high.

The UK continues to urge all parties to facilitate rapid and safe access for humanitarian agencies to enable aid to reach all those in need. The UK welcomed and continues to support the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) for commercial imports, which became operational on 5 May. UNVIM has sped up the clearance process for ships; however, damage to

port infrastructure and deteriorating economic conditions means that the supply of basic goods into the country is still below pre-conflict levels.

There have been continued reports that the Houthis and forces loyal to ex-President Saleh have arbitrarily arrested, detained, and abducted government supporters, journalists and human rights defenders. Amnesty International reported that detainees have been tortured, and enforced disappearances have taken place, as part of a campaign to quash dissent. The UK remains concerned by the ongoing detention of a member of the Baha'i faith in Yemen, an example of religious persecution.

UNESCO has expressed concern over continued damage to Yemen's cultural heritage following reports that buildings have been damaged. IHL requires all parties to protect cultural heritage, and the UK has reminded the governments of Yemen and Saudi Arabia of their obligations to protect cultural heritage.
