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Republic of Yemen

Head of state: **Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi**

Head of government: **Khaled Bahah (assumed office in October following dismissal of Mohammed Salim Basindwa in September)**

Government forces committed human rights violations, including unlawful killings and enforced disappearances, against supporters of secession in the south and amid renewed conflict with Huthi rebels in the north, who also committed abuses. Impunity prevailed and no progress was achieved in putting an end to political assassinations or addressing abuses committed in the past. Security forces dispersed peaceful protests in both Sana'a and southern cities using excessive force. Freedom of expression suffered as a result of ongoing attacks and other violations targeting journalists and media outlets. Women continued to face discrimination and high levels of domestic and other gender-based violence. Armed opposition groups carried out indiscriminate bombings and committed other abuses. US forces used drone strikes against suspected al-Qa'ida militants, resulting in deaths and injuries to civilians.

Background

The process of political transition ignited by the popular uprising of 2011 continued but remained fragile. On 26 February, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2140, creating sanctions targeting individuals and organizations seen as obstructing the transition.

The outbreak of renewed hostilities between the government and the Huthis, a Zaidi Shi'a armed group based in the Sa'ada and 'Amran governorates, posed a major threat to the transition process. In September, one day after signing a UN-brokered agreement to bring an end to the fighting, Huthi forces seized control of much of the capital Sana'a.

The 10 months-long National Dialogue Conference (NDC), which brought together 565 representatives of rival political parties and movements and civil society organizations, including women's and youth groups, concluded on 25 January. It generated over 1,800 recommendations, including some advocating greater protection for rights, and concluded that Yemen should become a federal state with a new Constitution.

In June, during the UN Universal Periodic Review of Yemen, government representatives confirmed that Yemen would become a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the International Convention against enforced disappearance. At the end of the year, parliament had still to adopt legislation to give effect to these ratifications.

The government failed to undertake significant reform of the army and two security agencies – National Security and Political Security – which were implicated in serious human rights violations and reported directly to the President.

Armed conflict

The year saw a continuing deterioration in security across the country, marked by killings of government and senior military officials, abductions of foreign nationals and other individuals, and resurgent armed conflict.

In the north, dozens were killed and hundreds wounded during armed clashes that began in 2013 between the Huthis and supporters of the Sunni Islamist al-Islah party and the Salafi al-Rashad party in the town of Dammaj in Sa'ada governorate. Thousands of al-Rashad supporters from Dammaj, mainly the families of students studying at the al-Rashad-affiliated Dar al-Hadith religious institute, were forcibly displaced after a ceasefire agreement in January 2014. Despite the ceasefire agreement, the fighting spread southward and by mid-2014 Huthi fighters had clashed with their opponents and the Yemeni army and taken over most of the 'Amran, Hajja and al-Jawf governorates. In September, Huthi forces attacked and took control of much of Sana'a after fighting in which over 270 people died and hundreds were wounded. Armed Huthi fighters in the capital looted army units, government buildings, political party headquarters, media outlets and the private homes of al-Islah party members. Later, despite agreeing to a ceasefire and joining a new government formed in November, Huthi forces moved south of Sana'a and clashed with local army units, tribesmen, and armed fighters affiliated with the armed group al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). In response, AQAP carried out attacks in Sana'a and other cities, which killed and injured many civilians, including children.

In the south, government forces clashed with AQAP fighters, who mounted suicide and other attacks targeting government installations, including an attack on 5 December 2013 that killed at

least 57 people, including staff and patients, at a military hospital in Sana'a. In June, AQAP also attacked an army checkpoint in Shabwah, killing eight Yemeni army soldiers and six tribesmen assisting them. AQAP said the attacks were in response to US drone strikes on its forces, carried out with the support of the Yemeni government. The Yemeni army attacked AQAP positions in Abyan and Shabwa governorates in April; the ensuing fighting reportedly caused the forcible displacement of some 20,000 people. US military forces also attacked AQAP, carrying out drone strikes that targeted and killed AQAP militants, and also reportedly caused the death and injury of an unknown number of civilians. In December, an attempt by US military forces to free Luke Somers, a journalist held hostage by AQAP, resulted in his death and that of another hostage.

Both government forces and armed opposition groups recruited and used child soldiers, according to a report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in August, despite efforts to ban the practice.

Political killings

Assassinations targeting political figures and security officials continued. On 21 January, one of the most prominent Huthi leaders, Ahmed Sharaf el-Din, was assassinated on his way to the National Dialogue Conference in Sana'a. In November, masked gunmen shot dead Dr Mohammad Abdul-Malik al-Mutawakkil, a prominent political figure and university professor, in a Sana'a street. Between mid-2012 and the end of 2014, over 100 military officials and security officers were assassinated and dozens of others survived attempted assassinations. Those responsible for most of these killings were not identified and no report of any prosecutions of alleged perpetrators was received.

Excessive use of force

On 9 September, army soldiers in Sana'a opened fire on a crowd of Huthi protesters demanding a change of government, killing at least seven and wounding others. Two days earlier, security forces had opened fire on Huthi demonstrators on the airport road in Sana'a, killing at least two peaceful protesters. Investigations were announced into some incidents of excessive force used to disperse demonstrations in the south (see below) and also in Sana'a on 9 June 2013, which led to the deaths of at least 13 demonstrators and the wounding of over 50. The outcome of the investigations remained unclear at the end of the year.

Repression of dissent – southern Yemen

Serious unrest continued in Aden and surrounding areas. Some Southern Movement (al-Hirak al-Janoubi) factions participated in the NDC. Demonstrators in Aden and other cities continued to call for the south to secede and held strikes and other protests, some of which the army responded to with excessive and unlawful lethal force. On 21 February, security forces used excessive force to disperse demonstrations in al-Mukallah city and in Aden, causing two deaths and injuring over 20 protesters.

On 27 December 2013 the army's 33rd armoured brigade killed dozens of peaceful mourners at al-Sanah in al-Dale' governorate, prompting the President to announce an official investigation, the outcome of which had not been disclosed by the end of 2014. The same army brigade reportedly killed and injured more civilians in apparently indiscriminate shelling and other attacks in early

2014, including one on 16 January that killed 10 civilians, including two children, and wounded 20 other civilians in apparent reprisal for a Southern Movement attack on an army checkpoint in al-Dale'.

Government security forces arrested Southern Movement activists in Aden and other cities, subjecting some to enforced disappearance. On 31 August, Khaled al-Junaidi was beaten and then dragged into a car by unidentified gunmen, whom witnesses assumed were security officials. He then disappeared. The authorities did not acknowledge his detention and his family was unable to establish his fate or whereabouts. Security forces had previously detained him on at least four occasions, including for three weeks in November 2013 when he was kept in solitary confinement. He was released on 27 November, but was shot and killed, apparently by a member of the security forces, on 15 December.

Legal, constitutional or institutional developments

In November 2013, amendments to the Judicial Authority Law handed powers previously exercised by the Ministry of Justice to the Supreme Judicial Council, enhancing judicial independence. New measures in 2014 included a draft law to create a National Human Rights Commission and a proposed Child Rights Law. The latter would, among other reforms, address the problem of early marriage by setting the minimum age of marriage at 18, prohibit the use of the death penalty on children under 18, and criminalize female genital mutilation. Both draft laws were awaiting enactment at the end of the year.

On 8 March, the President issued Presidential Decrees 26/2014 and 27/2014 establishing the Constitutional Drafting Commission and naming its 17 members. Under the Decrees, the Commission was granted a year to finish drafting the Constitution to be followed by public consultations and a referendum.

Freedom of expression

Journalists and other media workers were subject to threats and physical attacks by government forces and unidentified armed men. On 11 June, the Presidential Guard raided the Yemen Today satellite TV channel, forcing it to cease broadcasting, and closed down *Yemen Today* newspaper, apparently without authorization from the Public Prosecutor. Local media freedom organizations said they had recorded 146 incidents in the first half of 2014 of threats, attacks or other abuses against journalists. Armed Huthi fighters raided a number of media outlets in Sana'a in September and forcibly closed them down.

Impunity

The authorities made little progress in addressing the widespread human rights abuses of previous years.

The government took no steps to clarify the fate of hundreds of political activists and others who were subjected to enforced disappearance under the former regime, headed for decades by former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, or to bring those responsible to justice, despite the reappearance of a number of people forcibly disappeared decades earlier.

Transitional justice

After numerous drafts that fell far short of safeguarding justice and accountability for past crimes, a draft Law on Transitional Justice and National Reconciliation, created at the NDC's behest, was submitted for cabinet approval in May but had not been made law by the end of the year. Similarly, at the end of the year, the President had still to appoint the members of a Commission of Inquiry to investigate human rights violations committed during the 2011 uprising, which he had announced in September 2012. Two other commissions that the President had announced in 2013 were inundated with claims. One, tasked with addressing the issue of land confiscation in southern Yemen in the 1990s, had received over 100,000 claims by May while the other, set up to review the forced dismissal of southerners from government employment, had registered 93,000 claims by the same time. Neither, however, appeared sufficiently resourced to address and resolve the claims they received.

Women's and Girls' rights

Women and girls continued to face discrimination in both law and practice, notably in relation to marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance. They also faced high levels of domestic and other gender-specific violence. Early marriage and forced marriages continued and in some areas female genital mutilation was widely practised.

The NDC recommended that universities and other higher education institutions should reserve 30% of places for the admission of women students, and that the new Constitution should require government agencies to operate a 30% quota for employing women.

Refugees' and migrants' rights

Yemen dealt with a large flow of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants seeking safety, protection or economic opportunities during the year. Many entered Yemen after crossing by boat from Ethiopia and Somalia. Transit and reception centres were fully managed by UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, and its implementing partners without the government taking an active role.

Death penalty

The death penalty remained in force for a wide range of crimes. Courts continued to impose death sentences and executions were carried out. Prisoners on death row reportedly included dozens of juvenile offenders sentenced for crimes committed while they were under 18 years of age.

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