



HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
WATCH

## “We Pray to God by Torturing Journalists”

Warring Parties’ Systematic Violations Against  
Journalists and Press Freedom in Yemen



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Press Freedom in Yemen**

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## Summary

“We pray to God by torturing journalists.”

—Houthi prison authorities to Abdulkhaliq Emran, a released journalist

Since the start of the conflict in Yemen in 2014, both the Houthis and other authorities in Yemen, in particular the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and the Yemeni government, have committed serious human rights violations against journalists. In 2015, Houthi leader Abdel-Malek al-Houthi demonstrated the hostile attitude of warring parties towards journalists when he declared in a televised speech that “mercenaries and agents among...media workers are more dangerous to this country [Yemen] than the traitors and mercenaries of [the Yemeni government] security forces.”

The violations by parties to the conflict include arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, torture and inhuman treatment, and the killing of journalists. Authorities on all sides of the conflict have also perpetrated broader violations against freedom of speech and against the press, including through the seizure of media institutions, and the intimidation and harassment of journalists and media institutions and obstruction of their movement and work.

Warring parties’ targeting of journalists and media institutions has encroached on freedom of expression, which includes access to information, in Yemen. Many journalists have fled the country due to the abuses they have faced, or their fear of abuse, by warring parties. Those who have stayed have often been forced to limit what they write to avoid being targeted by authorities.

Immediately after taking over Sanaa in 2014, the Houthis began a sweeping campaign of arrests of journalists and media workers on the basis of their work. Some of them, including Nabil al-Sadawi, a journalist at Saba News Agency who was detained by the Houthis in September 2015, remain in prison. Others, like Abdelkhaleq Emran, Tawfiq al-Mansouri, Hareth Hamid, and Akram al-Walidi were arbitrarily detained for eight years, where they were subjected to torture and sentenced to death before being released in a prisoner exchange in 2023.



A female journalist mourns her colleagues Wael al-Absi and Taqi al-Din al-Hudhaifi, who were reportedly killed by a shell while covering events in Taizz. © 2025 Ahmed al-Basha.

Other warring parties have engaged in similar abuses. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, on February 18, 2021, security forces in Hadramawt governorate, which is under the control of the internationally recognized Yemeni government, detained several journalists during protests, including Hala Fuad Badawi for one year on what the committee described as “a trumped-up terrorism charge.”

The Southern Transitional Council (STC), a group backed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) that controls several governorates in Yemen, including the temporary capital Aden, has also detained journalists and media workers throughout the conflict, and has steadily been cracking down on civic space in the territories under their control.

Human Rights Watch documented 14 cases of abuses against journalists that are discussed in this report, including five cases of journalists who have recently been or are currently arbitrarily detained by the Houthis and the STC since November 2023 below: three cases by the Houthis, and two by the STC.

Four journalists who were previously detained by warring parties and later released spoke to Human Rights Watch about being severely tortured in prison, in addition to other forms of ill treatment. They said that they believed the authorities subjected them to more brutal treatment in prison than other detainees as a means to scare them, and others, away from reporting independently on their abuses, mismanagement, and corruption.

Mohammed al-Salahi, a journalist from Taizz, was detained by Houthi security forces in Hodeidah in 2018 and not released until 2023, two years after the court had ordered for his release. He told Human Rights Watch, “[Authorities] beat me with cables, slapped me, strangled me, suffocated me, suspended me for long periods, deprived me of sleep and toilet access, held a gun to my head and neck, and threatened me with execution of my fellow journalists. This caused health effects that I still suffer from.”

In some cases, authorities have detained the family members of journalists either in addition to or in place of them, often to coerce journalists to “confess” to bogus charges against them, and/or as a means to stop them from carrying out their work.

Mayas Maher, the brother of Ahmed Maher, a journalist detained by the STC in 2022, was detained alongside Ahmed and held for several months. Mayas stated that authorities detained and tortured him to pressure Ahmed to confess to whatever the authorities wanted.

In addition to harassing, detaining, and disappearing journalists and media workers, many journalists have been killed throughout the last ten years in Yemen, including in likely assassinations by warring parties. However, there have not been adequate investigations to determine the perpetrators in most instances documented by Human Rights Watch.

According to the National Organization of Yemeni Media Professionals (SADA), 63 journalists and media workers were killed in Yemen between January 2015 and December 2023. The Committee to Protect Journalists has documented the deaths of 26 journalists since the start of the conflict in September 2014, including two journalists who they confirmed were murdered. Other journalists were killed as a result of crossfire or as a result of being on a “dangerous assignment,” or their cause of death was unknown. This includes at least six journalists who were killed by Saudi and UAE-led coalition airstrikes early in the war.

The Houthis and the STC have also seized and/or shut down several major media institutions across the country since the start of the conflict as a means of limiting free expression. This report documents four of the more recent cases in the past four years in which the Houthis and the STC have taken over or shut down media institutions, including Yemen Live for Yemen Live for Media Production and Satellite Broadcasting and Yemen Digital Media; Sawt al-Yemen; SABA News Agency; and the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate.

In the north, the Houthis began taking over media institutions as soon as they seized Sanaa. Between 2014 and 2024, they raided and took over almost all official and private media institutions, including Al-Thawra, SABA News Agency, Al Jazeera's Sanaa office, and Al-Masdar Journal office. In many cases, the Houthis confiscated the media institutions' equipment and offices, detained and forcibly disappeared their staff members, and replaced staff with pro-Houthi journalists and staff. In some cases, the Houthis have continued to run the official institutions since taking them over such as SABA News Agency and Al-Thawra, using them as their official media.

In the south, freedom of expression has been steadily shrinking over the past four years, particularly as the STC has also taken over Yemeni media institutions and replaced them with newly established "southern" institutions, as well as replacing prior staff with people who are associated with and/or support the STC.

Mahmoud Thabit, the head of the Yemen Journalist Syndicate in Aden – an institution which had its offices taken over by the STC – told Human Rights Watch that the Syndicate now does its work "in secret, because we are scared of possible violations that might be committed against our members."

In addition to facing arbitrary arrests and attacks, journalists described authorities' use of threats of arrest, including through baseless court orders, as one of the many ways in which authorities sought to silence them. Youssef Hazib, the head the National Organization of Yemeni Reporters (SADA), said that SADA had documented over 24 cases in the last two years in which the official indictments explicitly list journalism as the basis of the charges. This includes journalists like Muna al-Majidi, a TV presenter in Aden, who received a legal summons from STC authorities in 2023 after criticizing an STC official in Aden according to the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate (YJS).

The Media Freedom Observatory (Marsadak) reported in its 2024 Media Freedom Report that 15 journalists were detained due to their media work during the year, some of whom remain detained. Of these, seven were detained in Houthi-controlled areas, and eight in areas the Yemeni government and the STC control.

Nabil Osaidi, a board member of the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate, added “the space for [journalistic] freedom has been shrinking.” He said that authorities have been surveilling journalists, and that journalists may be detained at any moment for something as inconsequential as a social media post that is criticizing an authority.

Journalists also described having their freedom of movement limited because of their fears of being arrested by authorities at checkpoints and at airports. Many also described threats to their family members.

Many of the journalists who spoke to Human Rights Watch said that one of the biggest challenges they face in Yemen is traveling – particularly between governorates, as well as abroad – due to the risk that they may be stopped at checkpoints or by airport officials and harassed, detained, or disappeared because of their work as journalists. Many described working under a pseudonym, or changing aspects of how they worked, due to their fears of being arrested or killed by authorities. Others stated that they had moved abroad due to threats of arrest they had received from authorities in Yemen.

Lubna Sadeq, a freelancer journalist in Aden, says that she tried to hide her identity as a journalist when traveling through checkpoints because she fears the reaction of checkpoint officials if they discovered that she was a journalist. “Even in my passport, my colleagues advised me to write my occupation as “student” to avoid getting into trouble at checkpoints,” she said.

Authorities across the country have also obstructed journalists’ and media institutions’ work by imposing arbitrary and cumbersome regulations that often discriminate against those from areas controlled by other warring parties or against those who are not actively supporting the authority in charge. Journalists reported being surveilled by authorities, being required to apply for permits and security clearances for a wide range of activities and being arbitrarily blocked from attending or covering certain events.

Authorities in Yemen, including the Yemeni government, the Houthis, and the Southern Transitional Council, have obligations under both international and domestic laws to protect freedom of expression, which includes journalism. Under both international and national law, they also must not arbitrarily detain, forcibly disappear, torture, or murder people.

# Recommendations

## To All Authorities in Yemen

- Ensure that the rights of all those living in Yemen to freedom of expression are protected.
- Ensure that media institutions and media workers are allowed to operate independently, and end seizures and takeovers of media institutions.
- Immediately lift all bureaucratic procedures abusively impeding the work of media institutions and media workers and end harassment of them, including at checkpoints and through abusive court orders.
- Lift all restrictions on online news websites.
- Ensure that the right to access information, as granted under Yemeni Law No. (13) of 2012, is fully protected and enforced.
- Take immediate steps to end any and all enforced disappearances, including unacknowledged detentions for any period of time.
- Immediately reveal, or promptly establish, the fate and whereabouts of all missing persons.
- Immediately end all practices of arbitrary detention, detention of individuals outside of officially designated places of detention, and incommunicado detention.
- Investigate all credible allegations of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances by forces and agencies under their control; identify and prosecute in conformity with international standards of fairness all those implicated in such practices, including law enforcement and military officials who condone or are complicit in such practice.
- Immediately end the use of torture and other ill-treatment of detainees.
- Undertake prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all well-founded allegations of torture or other ill-treatment, report publicly on the findings of those investigations, and bring all those responsible for violations against detainees to justice through fair proceedings.
- Either charge any individual in custody with an internationally recognized crime, in which case give them immediate access to lawyers of their choice and inform their family accordingly, or immediately release them.

- Introduce and consistently enforce, with immediate effect, a policy of “zero tolerance” of torture throughout the criminal justice system.
- Ensure all persons detained for whatever reason are promptly brought, in person, before a judge or judicial authority that can rule on the legality and necessity of their detention.
- In all remand hearings and other court proceedings, when detainees are brought before a judge, ensure that members of the judiciary and prosecution and government officials are attentive to indications and allegations that prisoners have been subjected to torture or other ill-treatment; if signs of ill-treatment are observed or if such allegations are substantiated by other credible evidence, order prompt, thorough and impartial investigations.
- Ensure that all those involved in military and law enforcement operations are made fully aware of the provisions of national and international law applicable to their actions and their potential personal and command responsibility for any breaches of these provisions.
- Fully cooperate with the relevant special procedures mechanisms of the UN, specifically the Special Rapporteur on Torture, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions, and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; allow these special procedures mechanisms to undertake visits to Yemen, including across territories held by different authorities; issue invitations to special procedures mandate holders to visit the country, and provide access to both official places of detention and other places where unofficial detention of individuals has been alleged.
- Urgently improve conditions in detention centers to meet international standards, including ensuring detainees are treated in a humane and dignified manner, with sufficient access to space, food, water, adequate medical treatment, and sanitation.
- Thoroughly investigate any allegations of abuse by officials and hold perpetrators to account.
- Provide full and adequate reparations to journalists and media workers whose rights have been violated.

## **To the Internationally Recognized Government of Yemen**

- Ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

## **To the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions, and the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances**

- Request a visit to Yemen to monitor the human rights situation and document and report on the violations of human rights against civilians, including journalists, such as arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture.

## **To Member States of the United Nations Human Rights Council**

- Use all opportunities for oral interventions at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), including the forthcoming 60<sup>th</sup> session (commencing September 8, 2025) to raise serious concerns about violations of human rights in Yemen, including condemning the arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances of journalists and other media workers, and call for the immediate release of all those arbitrarily detained.
- Call for monitoring and reporting to the HRC by the High Commissioner for Human Rights and press for the next Item 10 HRC resolution on Yemen to include a request for monitoring and reporting by the High Commissioner.
- Call for and propose initiatives at the HRC to establish an independent, international investigative mechanism, in accordance with calls by Yemeni civil society and international human rights NGOs.

## **To States Supporting the Houthis, the Yemeni Government and the Southern Transitional Council**

- Press all parties to end their abuses of media workers and media institutions, and to ensure the protection of freedom of expression for media workers and all people living in Yemen.

- Call on all parties to immediately release detained journalists, return seized media institutions, and ensure accountability for violations committed against them.
- Press the parties to provide full and adequate reparations to journalists, media workers and institutions that they have committed violations against throughout the course of conflict.

## Methodology

This report is based on 27 interviews Human Rights Watch conducted between October 2024 and May 2025, including 16 journalists (four of whom were previously detained), media professionals, members of Yemeni civil society, family members of detained and disappeared journalists and a lawyer. Interviews were conducted in Arabic.

Interviews were conducted both remotely and in-person. Human Rights Watch informed all interviewees of the nature and purpose of our research and our intentions to publish a report with the information gathered. We informed each potential interviewee that they were under no obligation to speak with us, that Human Rights Watch does not provide legal or other assistance, and that they could stop speaking with us or decline to answer any question with no adverse consequences. We obtained oral consent for each interview. Interviewees did not receive material compensation for speaking with Human Rights Watch.

Human Rights Watch also reviewed and analyzed photos and documents related to the cases investigated, including official documents and court indictments, among other items.

On August 13, 2025, Human Rights Watch wrote to the Houthi authorities, the Yemeni government, and the Southern Transitional Council outlining our findings, asking a series of questions, and requesting comment. While the Southern Transitional Council did not respond, representatives of the Southern Media and Journalists Syndicate wrote to Human Rights Watch responding to some of the questions posed to the STC, specifically regarding the group's takeover of the Yemeni Journalists' Syndicate (YJS) office in Aden in 2023. The Southern Syndicate stated that the YJS had not been legally registered, and that the Southern Syndicate was the "only legitimate and legal syndicate [representing journalists and media professionals] in the Republic of Yemen." STC authorities are responsible for renewing and registering organizations, meaning that it is under the group's authority which syndicates are legally registered, and which are not.

Human Rights Watch did not receive responses from the Houthis or the Yemeni government at the time of report finalization.

Some names throughout the report have been changed to pseudonyms to protect identities of individuals who feared reprisals by authorities either against themselves or against their family members for speaking with Human Rights Watch.

## Background

In September 2014, the Houthis – an armed group in Yemen that controls the capital, Sanaa, and much of northern Yemen – took over Sanaa, causing the internationally recognized Yemeni government to flee to southern areas of the country and sparking a non-international armed conflict. In March 2015, a coalition of states led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) began military operations against the Houthis, significantly intensifying the conflict.<sup>1</sup>

The war has been devastating for civilians in Yemen. Since 2014, warring parties have killed and wounded thousands of civilians and damaged and destroyed vital civilian infrastructure. According to the 2025 UN Yemen Humanitarian Overview (HNO), the conflict has left an estimated 19.5 million people in need of humanitarian aid.<sup>2</sup> About half of the population does not have adequate access to food and water.<sup>3</sup>

In April 2022, Yemen's warring parties agreed to a two-month truce that was then renewed twice.<sup>4</sup> Since October 2022, when the truce officially ended, hostilities have remained limited, and the Saudi and UAE-led coalition has not resumed its aerial campaign. Saudi Arabia and the Houthis, in coordination with the UN, continue to hold negotiations to formalize an end to the conflict between those two parties. Those negotiations have often not included other warring parties, including the Yemeni government and the Southern Transitional Council (STC),<sup>5</sup> let alone stakeholders, including victims-rights groups.

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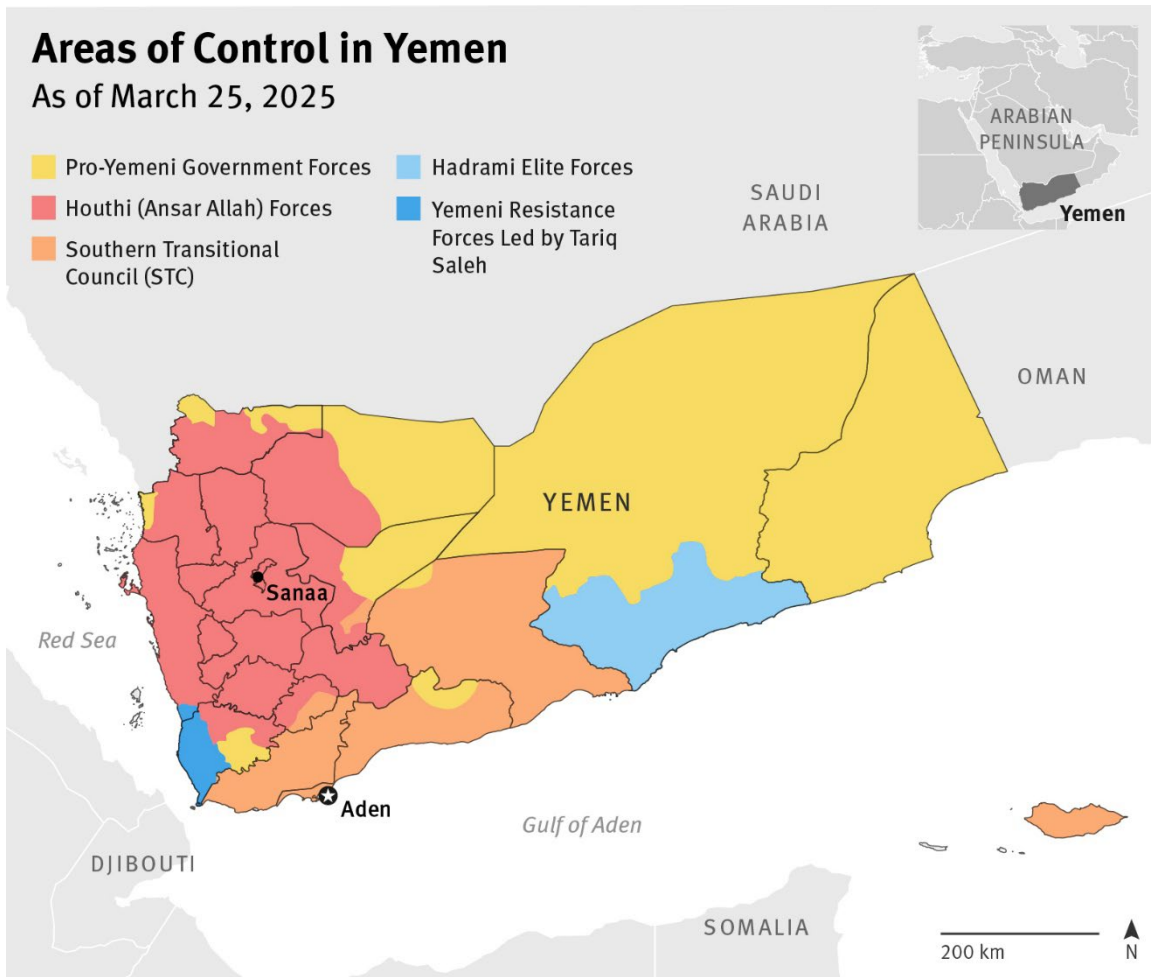
<sup>1</sup> ACLED, "Actor Profile: Saudi-Led Coalition | Yemen Conflict Observatory," May 6, 2024. <https://acleddata.com/yemen-conflict-observatory/actor-profiles/saudi-led-coalition/>.

<sup>2</sup> UN OCHA, "Yemen Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025" January 15, 2025. <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2025-january-2025>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, "Press Statement by the UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg on a Two-Month Truce | United Nations Secretary-General," April 1, 2022. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2022-04-01/note-correspondents-press-statement-the-un-special-envoy-for-yemen-hans-grundberg-two-month-truce>.

<sup>5</sup> The Southern Transitional Council (STC) is a secessionist political party, with a military wing, established in 2017 with support from the United Arab Emirates. The STC is part of the eight-member Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) that governs some parts of the country along with the Yemeni government. They also have effective control over several southern governorates, including Aden.



Source: Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies.

Note: The Southern Transitional Council, Hadrami Elite Forces, and the Yemeni National Resistance Forces are all supported by the UAE. All three groups, along with the Yemeni government, are aligned under the Presidential Leadership Council.

Graphic © 2025 Human Rights Watch.

Though the government and the STC have been adversaries throughout the conflict, they both are part of the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) which replaced former President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi in 2022.<sup>6</sup> Despite being in this government coalition, there are several governorates that the STC effectively controls, including Aden.

<sup>6</sup> The Presidential Leadership Council was formed in April 2022 as a collective executive body replacing President Hadi's authority, with the aim of unifying anti-Houthi factions. It is composed of eight members representing various political parties and military groups. See: "A Presidential Announcement for Transferring Powers to a Presidential Leadership Council," Official Website of President Dr. Rashad al-Alimi, April 7, 2022, <https://president.alimi.net/en/news42.html>.

Throughout the conflict, in addition to conflict-related violations, warring parties, including the Houthis, the Yemeni government, and the STC, have committed a wide range of serious human rights violations, including of freedom of expression and the press.<sup>7</sup>

In September 2017, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) established the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen (GEE), a body that investigated and reported on abuses of international humanitarian and human rights law in Yemen.<sup>8</sup> The HRC subsequently renewed the group's mandate annually for four years, but in 2021, after Saudi Arabia vigorously lobbied members of the HRC to end the mandate of the body, the HRC voted down the resolution seeking to renew the GEE's mandate.<sup>9</sup> Since then, there has been no independent, international mechanism to monitor and report on the human rights situation in Yemen.

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<sup>7</sup> Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2024: Events of 2023," <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/yemen>, January 11, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/yemen>.

<sup>8</sup> See UN HRC, "Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen," n.d., <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/yemen-gee/index>

<sup>9</sup> UN HRC, "Statement by Group of Experts on Yemen on HRC rejection of resolution to renew their mandate," October 8, 2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/10/statement-group-experts-yemen-hrc-rejection-resolution-renew-their-mandate>.

## Arbitrary Detentions and Enforced Disappearances of Journalists

Throughout the conflict, warring parties have carried out arrests and enforced disappearances of dozens of journalists. Human Rights Watch documented 14 cases of abuses against journalists that are discussed in this report, including five journalists who have recently been, or are currently arbitrarily detained by the Houthis and the STC since November 2023: three cases by the Houthis, and two by the STC.

Immediately after taking over Sanaa in 2014, the Houthis began a wide-sweeping campaign of arrests of journalists and media workers. Some of them, including Nabil al-Sadawi, a journalist at Saba News Agency – Yemen’s official state news agency – who was detained by the Houthis in September 2015, remain in prison.<sup>10</sup> Others, like Abdelkhaleq Emran, Tawfiq al-Mansouri, Hareth Hamid, and Akram al-Walidi were arbitrarily detained for eight years, during which they were subject to immense torture and sentenced to death on unfounded charges of espionage before being released in a prisoner exchange in 2023.<sup>11</sup> After being released, the Houthis continued to impose a death sentence on them, which forced all of them to flee Yemen.<sup>12</sup>

In 2024 alone, the Houthis arbitrarily detained at least three journalists, whose cases are detailed below: Mohammed al-Mayahi, Mohammed al-Nabhi, and Fahd Yahia al-Arhabi. The Houthis have also detained dozens, if not hundreds, of others simply for exercising their right to freedom of expression,<sup>13</sup> including activists such as Sahar al-Khoulani and Abdulrahman Nowairah, both detained in 2024 after criticizing Houthi abuses on their

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<sup>10</sup> Amnesty International, “Yemen: Huthis Must End the Prosecution of Journalists and Crackdown on Media,” public statement, December 20, 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/MDE3161892022ENGLISH.pdf>; Saba, “Al-Eryani Condemns Houthi Militia’s Continued Detention of Journalist Nabil Al-Saddawi for Nine Years,” *Yemen News Agency (Saba)*, August 21, 2024, <https://www.sabanew.net/viewstory/115999>.

<sup>11</sup> Amnesty International, “Urgent Action Outcome: Four Journalists On Death Row Released,” April 16, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/urgent-action-outcome-four-journalists-death-row-released>.

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Abdelkhaleq, February 17, 2025; Amnesty International, “Yemen: When journalism is a case of life or death!”, op-ed, November 2, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/11/yemen-when-journalism-is-a-case-of-life-or-death/>; Amnesty International, “Yemen: Further Information: release journalists at risk of execution: Akram al-Walidi, Abdelkhaleq Amran, Hareth Hamid, and Tawfiq al-Mansouri,” June 6, 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde31/5654/2022/en/>.

<sup>13</sup> Amnesty International, “Yemen: Huthis Must End Use of Judicial System to Silence Dissent,” March 25, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde31/1990/2020/en/>; Human Rights Watch, “Yemen: New Wave of Houthi Arbitrary Arrests,” October 15, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/15/yemen-new-wave-houthi-arbitrary-arrests>.

social media pages.<sup>14</sup> Both individuals were released after five and two months in detention, respectively.<sup>15</sup>

In May 2025, the Houthis launched a campaign targeting journalists and media activists in Hodeidah for detention, during which they arrested and arbitrarily detained at least six journalists, according to the Yemen Journalist Syndicate (YJS), which called for their immediate release.<sup>16</sup>

Other warring parties have also detained journalists. On February 18, 2021, security forces in Hadramawt governorate, which is under the control of the Yemeni government, detained several journalists during protests, including Hala Fuad Badawi for one year on “a trumped-up terrorism charge,” according to Reporters Without Borders.<sup>17</sup> According to the Cairo Institute, two of the journalists were covering the protests and security forces arrested them “before the protest started... without providing any explanation for their arrest.”<sup>18</sup> In 2022, Amnesty International also reported on the Yemeni government’s prosecution of three journalists over content that was critical of the government.<sup>19</sup>

According to the Media Freedom Observatory and other journalists, the security forces in Marib, another governorate under the control of the Yemeni government, have also detained several journalists and media activists.<sup>20</sup>

The STC has also detained journalists and media workers throughout the conflict. In 2020, STC security forces arbitrarily detained and disappeared journalist Adel al-Hasani, who had

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<sup>14</sup> SAM for Rights and Liberties. “The Arrest of Sahar al Kholani Family Is a Violation of Law and Rights,” January 30, 2025, <https://samrl.org/l.php?l=e/10/A/c/1/69/71/5468>; Al-Masdar Online, “Activist Abdulrahman Al-Nuwaira Joins the List of the Forcibly Disappeared in Sanaa,” November 16, 2024, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/305884>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Yemeni Journalists Syndicate, via Facebook, “Journalists Syndicate Condemns Abduction Campaign Against Journalists in Al-Hudaydah and Demands Their Immediate Release,” May 26, 2025, <https://shorturl.at/uUp53>.

<sup>17</sup> Reporters Without Borders, “Yemeni Woman Journalist Jailed for ‘Involvement in Terrorist Cell,’” January 6, 2022, <https://rsf.org/en/yemeni-woman-journalist-jailed-involvement-terrorist-cell>.

<sup>18</sup> Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, “Violations Against Civilians Including Journalists, Human Rights Defenders, and Academics in Yemen,” October 4, 2021, <https://cihrs.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Violations-against-civilians-including-journalists-human-rights-defenders-and-academics-in-Yemen.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Amnesty International, “Yemen: Government Must Stop Prosecution and Harassment of Journalists,” August 18, 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/08/yemen-government-must-stop-prosecution-and-harassment-of-journalists/>.

<sup>20</sup> Marsadak – Media Freedoms Observatory, “Report Media Freedoms Annual 2024,” March 19, 2025, <https://marsadak.org/en/annualreport-en-24/>; Human Rights Watch interviews with two other journalists, December 2024.

worked directly with CNN reporters who revealed in 2019 that Saudi Arabia and the UAE had transferred weapons purchased from the United States to al-Qaeda-linked forces, Salafi forces, and other armed groups in Yemen, in violation of Saudi and UAE agreements with the US.<sup>21</sup> A source close to al-Hasani said that STC security forces chained, threatened, and beat him to confess to using his work as a journalist to spy for foreign countries.<sup>22</sup>

In 2022 and 2023, the STC detained journalists Ahmed Maher and Naseh Shaker, respectively, in Aden. Ahmed Maher had been reporting on abuses by the STC, and Naseh Shaker had been reporting on other warring parties' abuses.

The STC has also detained many non-journalists for exercising their freedom of speech, including for protesting and for posting on social media, several people interviewed by Human Rights Watch over the last two years said. The STC has also been cracking down on civic space in areas under their control.<sup>23</sup>

Between March 2015 and August 2020, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented 357 cases of human rights violations and abuses against journalists, including “28 killings, two enforced disappearances, one abduction, 45 physical assaults, 184 arbitrary arrests and detentions, 16 death or physical violence threats against journalists, 24 seizures of media organizations, 26 closures of TV channels and newspaper companies, 27 attacks on media organizations and houses of journalists, and four death sentences imposed on journalists in violation of international human rights law.”<sup>24</sup>

In August 2020, Michelle Bachelet, the previous UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said, “Journalists [in Yemen] are under attack from all quarters.”<sup>25</sup> “They are killed, beaten

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<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Yemen: UAE-Backed Forces Torture Journalist,” February 22, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/22/yemen-uae-backed-forces-torture-journalist>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Amnesty International, “Yemen: Southern Transitional Council Must End Crackdown on Civic Space,” March 5, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/03/yemen-southern-transitional-council-must-end-crackdown-on-civic-space/>; Human Rights Watch, “Yemen: UAE-Backed Group Seizes Women’s Shelter,” July 18, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/18/yemen-uae-backed-group-seizes-womens-shelter>.

<sup>24</sup> UN OHCHR, “Yemen: Journalists under Attack from All Quarters, Says Bachelet,” August 6, 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2020/08/yemen-journalists-under-attack-all-quarters-says-bachelet>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

and disappeared; they are harassed and threatened; and they are jailed and sentenced to death for merely trying to shine a light on the brutality of this crisis.”<sup>26</sup>

In their 2021 report, the UN Group of Eminent Experts (UN GEE) stated that warring parties were forcibly disappearing, arbitrarily detaining, and torturing journalists, human rights defenders, and religious minorities “to silence their perceived opposition or to punish them for their religious beliefs, and to legitimize their power through the spread of fear.”<sup>27</sup>

More recently, the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate (YJS) documented 82 violations against journalists in 2024 alone, including cases of arbitrary detention, abusive trials and court summons, and harassment.<sup>28</sup>

Najm al-Deen Qassem, an investigative journalist and friend of a detained journalist, described risks that journalists in Yemen face. “All Yemeni journalists know that they will be targeted at one point or another, but they continue their work [as journalists], because they have no choice,” he said.<sup>29</sup> He added that it did not matter whether or not journalists are perceived as an ally or an enemy by a warring party – he felt that regardless, authorities would eventually target them.<sup>30</sup>

Lubna Sadeq (pseudonym), a freelancer journalist, told Human Rights Watch that often the violations and risks that female journalists face are even worse than what male journalists face.<sup>31</sup> She explained that women who are detained face shame and stigma from their communities “that lasts forever.”<sup>32</sup> She added that some families and communities may refuse to allow female journalists (and other women) who’ve been detained back into their

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, “Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen,” U.N. Doc. A/HRC/48/20, September 14, 2021, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/A-HRC-48-20-AUV.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> Yemeni Journalists Syndicate, “Yemeni Journalists Syndicate Launches Annual Report and Documents 82 Violations in 2023,” January 7, 2024, [https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/media\\_freedom\\_report-2023-Yemen.pdf](https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/media_freedom_report-2023-Yemen.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Najm al-Deen Qassem, freelancer journalist, and a friend of detained Mohammed al-Mayahi, December 2024.

<sup>30</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Najm al-Deen Qassem, freelancer journalist, and a friend of detained Mohammed al-Mayahi, December 2024.

<sup>31</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Lubna Sadeq (pseudonym), an independent journalist, December 2024.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

families upon their release, and that “some families think it's better for [a woman] to die than to be released from prison.”<sup>33</sup>

## Torture

Four Journalists detained by warring parties and later released spoke to Human Rights Watch about being severely tortured in prison, in addition to other forms of ill treatment.<sup>34</sup> They said that authorities subjected them to particularly brutal treatment in prison as a means to scare them, and others, away from reporting independently on their abuses.<sup>35</sup>

Abdelkhaleq Emran, a journalist from Sanaa who was detained by the Houthis in 2015 and later sentenced to death, was released in 2023 in a prisoner exchange as part of the UN-brokered truce. He described being subjected to immense psychological and physical torture by Houthi authorities, including beatings with metal and wooden rods, electric shocks, choking, and extensive isolation that left him with health problems. He said that the judge who sentenced him and three other journalists to death stated that “journalists are enemies of God and the nation,” and that the investigator had said that “the only way to silence journalists is through death.” He also said that the head of one of the prisons he was detained in had said “we pray to God by torturing journalists.”<sup>36</sup>

Mohammed al-Salahi, a journalist from Taizz, was detained by Houthi security forces in Hodeidah in 2018 and not released until 2023, two years after the court had ordered his release.<sup>37</sup> He told Human Rights Watch that he had been subjected to “psychological, physical, and verbal torture” throughout his detention. “They beat me with cables, slapped me, strangled me, suffocated me, suspended me for long periods, deprived me of sleep and toilet access, held a gun to my head and neck, and threatened me with execution of my fellow journalists. This caused health effects that I still suffer from.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Human Rights Watch remote and in-person interviews with Abdelkhaleq Emran, Ahmed Maher, Mohammed al-Salahi, and Abdulrahman Khaled (pseudonym).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Abdelkhaleq Emran, journalist who spent eight years in Houthi prison, February 17, 2025.

<sup>37</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Mohammed al-Salahi, a journalist, January 2025.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Abdulahman Khaled (pseudonym), a journalist detained by the Houthis from 2014 to 2016 due to his critique of the armed group prior to 2014, said he “wasn’t tortured that much compared to other journalists.”<sup>39</sup> However, he described being hung by one foot and beaten: “[The Houthis] knew I had a problem with one of my legs from back when I was playing football [soccer]. They would hang me from [that leg] and beat it over and over again, until my spine got affected.”<sup>40</sup> He stated that after being released from detention he had to spend two months abroad receiving medical treatment before returning back to Yemen.<sup>41</sup>

Human Rights Watch has previously documented systematic abuses in Houthi prisons.<sup>42</sup> In a 2023 report, the UN Security Council’s Panel of Experts on Yemen found that “Houthi-held prisoners are subjected to systematic psychological and physical torture, including the denial of medical intervention to cure the injuries caused by the torture inflicted, which for some prisoners resulted in permanent disabilities and death.”<sup>43</sup>

## Detention of and Threats to Family Members

In some cases, authorities have detained the family members of journalists either in addition to or in place of them.

Mayas Maher, the brother of Ahmed Maher, a journalist detained by the STC in 2022, was detained alongside Ahmed and held for several months. Mayas told Human Rights Watch that authorities had detained him and were torturing him as a means to pressure Ahmed to confess to arbitrary charges.<sup>44</sup> “They were tying our hands and legs and hanging us for half an hour to an hour,” he said.<sup>45</sup> Their father was also arrested briefly, but according to Mayas, “Ahmed said he would do whatever [the authorities] want as long as they let our father go.”<sup>46</sup> Their father was released after several hours.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Abdulrahman Khaled (pseudonym), a journalist investigating corruption issues, December 5, 2024.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Human Rights Watch report, “Yemen: Houthi Hostage-Taking,” September 25, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/09/25/yemen-houthi-hostage-taking>.

<sup>43</sup> United Nations Security Council, “*Report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen*,” U.N. Doc. S/2023/833 (July 2023), para. 125, [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S\\_2023\\_833.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2023_833.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Mayas Maher, October 17, 2024.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Abdulrahman Khaled told Human Rights Watch that the Houthis detained his brother for three days in 2019 “to put pressure me to go back to their areas of control after I fled [to Yemeni government-controlled territories].”<sup>48</sup> He said that he had been writing about corruption within the one of the Houthis’ ministries, and that in response, the Houthis “threatened [his] family that they would storm [their] house, and that they would assassinate [him] if [he] didn’t stop.”<sup>49</sup> He also said that authorities threatened to arrest his younger sister and “marry her to one of the Houthis’ leaders.”<sup>50</sup>

Ali Salman (pseudonym), an investigative journalist, said, “even though we like to see our names on our reports... we choose to use pseudonyms because it is necessary to protect ourselves, and our relatives who might be targeted because of us.”<sup>51</sup>

The UN Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen (GEE) reported in 2021 that a Yemeni journalist who had formerly been detained by a warring party said interrogators told him, “We know everyone in your family, and if you mess with us, you know what we can do.”<sup>52</sup>

## Five Cases of Detentions and Disappearances of Journalists Since 2022

### *Mohammed al-Mayahi, Detained and Disappeared September 20, 2024, by Houthi Forces*

Mohammed al-Mayahi was detained and disappeared by Houthi forces on Friday, September 20, 2024, from his home in Sanaa. According to one of his relatives, Houthi police wearing blue uniforms arrived at al-Mayahi’s house in the morning and quickly took him without an arrest warrant and without telling his family why they were arresting him or where they were taking him.<sup>53</sup>

Later in the day, Houthi forces returned to the house and raided it, taking al-Mayahi’s electronic devices, including laptops, phones, and a hard drive.<sup>54</sup> They also took various

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<sup>48</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Abdulrahman Khaled (pseudonym), a journalist investigating corruption issues, December 5, 2024.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Ali Salman (pseudonym), December 7, 2024.

<sup>52</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen*, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/48/20 (September 14, 2021).

<sup>53</sup> This account is based on a remote Human Rights Watch interview with one of al-Mayahi’s relatives, October 3, 2024; Human Rights Watch interview with Najm al-Deen Qassem, a friend of Mayahi’s, November 11, 2024.

<sup>54</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with one of al-Mayahi’s relatives, October 3, 2024.

personal items from his family members, according to his relative. Neighbors had told the same relative that they had also seen military vehicles outside of the house at the time of the arrest.<sup>55</sup>

A friend of al-Mayahi's told Human Rights Watch that the day before the arrest, al-Mayahi had posted criticism of the Houthis' ideology and "brainwashing campaigns" on his Facebook page, and stressed the importance of the September 26 revolution, which marks the establishment of the Yemen Arab Republic in 1962.<sup>56</sup>

For several years, the Houthis have carried out widespread arrests around September 26, as they believe that September 21, the day in which they took over Sanaa, should be celebrated in its place.<sup>57</sup> Al-Mayahi was one of dozens of people who were detained in 2024 in the days surrounding the anniversary of the revolution.<sup>58</sup>

Security forces did not disclose his whereabouts to his family or his lawyer, despite several complaints that his lawyer submitted to the criminal prosecutor's office.<sup>59</sup> His lawyer later posted on his Facebook page that despite trying everything to obtain information about al-Mayahi's whereabouts and visit him, he had been unable to do so.<sup>60</sup> He wrote: "I failed to save you Mohammed, I couldn't even reassure your wife and mother. Your lawyer, whom you trusted, admits that he let you down and could not reach you thirty days after your kidnapping."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Najm al-Deen Qassem. November 11, 2024.

<sup>57</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Yemen: New Wave of Houthi Arbitrary Arrests," October 15, 2024.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/15/yemen-new-wave-houthi-arbitrary-arrests#:~:text=The%20September%2026%20Revolution%20marks,be%20celebrated%20in%20its%20place>; Amnesty International. "Yemen: Wave of Arrests by Huthi de Facto Authorities Following Demonstrations," September 29, 2023. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/09/yemen-wave-of-arrests-by-huthi-de-facto-authorities-following-demonstrations/>.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with one of al-Mayahi's relatives, October 3, 2024.

<sup>60</sup> Ammar Yassen, Facebook page, June 16, 2024, [https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=8862458100460437&id=100000890061020](https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=8862458100460437&id=100000890061020).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

Al-Mayahi's relative told Human Rights Watch that al-Mayahi was able to call his family for the first time on November 3, 2024, and visited him in prison three days later, on November 6.<sup>62</sup>

SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties, a Yemeni civil society organization, wrote in January 2025 that al-Mayahi had been held in solitary confinement for one month of his detention, was deprived of sunlight, and "was only allowed to see his wife through a glass barrier, without being able to hear her voice."<sup>63</sup> SAM also stated that other prisoners described where al-Mayahi was being held in solitary confinement as "'hell,' where inmates are deprived of adequate light and air, receiving only a small piece of bread daily."<sup>64</sup>

In January, 2025, after several months in detention without trial or charge, al-Mayahi was unexpectedly brought to the Specialized Criminal Court where he appeared before the judges on charges relating to "disturbing public security and harming the system of governance."<sup>65</sup> His lawyers advocated for his case to be transferred to the Press and Publications Prosecution, a separate entity and has jurisdiction over cases related to journalists and the media, but this request was denied.<sup>66</sup> On May 24, 2025, the Specialized Criminal Court convicted him on the charges of "publicly and intentionally spreading false and misleading news and information with the aim of disturbing public security and peace, harming the public interest, and published statements and articles inciting against the state and its political system," and sentenced al-Mayahi to one and a half years in detention and ordered him to pay five million Yemeni riyals (about US\$20,800) as a financial guarantee, in addition to signing a written pledge, according to YJS.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with one of al-Mayahi relatives, June 18, 2024.

<sup>63</sup> SAM for Rights and Liberties, "Referring Journalist Mohammed al-Mayahi to Trial," January 13, 2025, <https://samrl.org/?l=e/10/A/c/1/69/71/5459/Referring-Journalist-Mohammed-Al-Mayahi-to-Trial>.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid; Ammar Yassen, Facebook Post, June 17, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/ammar.ahdal/posts/pfbidoHFzWNbejZwVaGk4pSQEzT2WPJaL3EF9EWnpMY2P2QTmu2AqxcJVhX33wuQLZpsTWL>.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Houthi-led specialized criminal prosecution official indictment decision text, reviewed by Human Rights Watch; Yemeni Journalists Syndicate, Facebook post, June 17, 2024, [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=pfbido2ErNY5t8tB3jqCdKgoxu5GjHB8KikwFWpE1XvH1SSib6p3fCSgZygnxzH8gxVinidl&id=100064879022605](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbido2ErNY5t8tB3jqCdKgoxu5GjHB8KikwFWpE1XvH1SSib6p3fCSgZygnxzH8gxVinidl&id=100064879022605).

*Mohammed al-Nabhi, Detained and Disappeared April 23, 2024, by Houthi Forces*

Mohammed al-Nabhi, the president of the Media Foundation for Transparency and Combating Corruption, a media organization focused on combating corruption by authorities, was abducted on April 23, 2024, by Houthi forces. As of April 2025, he continues to be detained without any charge, and his case has still not been transferred to prosecution officials.<sup>68</sup>

According to one of his family members, on the evening of April 23, 2024, just two days before his wedding, al-Nabhi left his house to run a quick errand and never returned.<sup>69</sup> “We didn’t realize he had disappeared until the next day when the neighbors informed us that a civilian car had been parked outside his house and had taken Mohammed,” she said. The neighbors reported that al-Nabhi had been shouting for help, urging neighbors to inform his family of what was happening and to follow him. For the next few weeks, al-Nabhi’s family contacted the Houthis’ Security and Intelligence Service numerous times trying to get information about his whereabouts, but authorities denied that they had any information.<sup>70</sup>

On May 11, 2024, at approximately 8:00 a.m., four uniformed soldiers arrived in a civilian bus, accompanied by al-Nabhi, who was handcuffed and blindfolded.<sup>71</sup> The soldiers raided al-Nabhi’s house, apparently looking for his personal phone, while filming. They continued their search for 15 minutes before leaving, according to his relative.<sup>72</sup>

On May 17, 2024, after the same relative called authorities and insisted that they knew that the Security and Intelligence Service had detained al-Nabhi, his family was finally able to speak with him.<sup>73</sup> Al-Nabhi informed them that authorities had not told him why he was being held.

Two days later, the authorities allowed his family to visit him for the first time. Since then, visits have been permitted every other week. According to his family member, al-Nabhi has not been charged officially, but they believe he was arrested due to his work exposing

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<sup>68</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with a relative of al-Nabhi’s, October 17, 2024.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

corruption in the import of pesticides. His family has no knowledge of whether he has had access to a lawyer during his detention.

Al-Nabhi suffers from colon and eye problems. His family member stated that he has been denied adequate medical care, and that his medical condition has been deteriorating in detention.<sup>74</sup>

*Fahd Yahia al-Arhabi, Detained August 21, 2024, by Houthi Forces*

On August 21, 2024, forces from the Houthis' Security and Intelligence Service in Amran governorate detained journalist Fahd al-Arhabi. He was subsequently released on February 18, 2025.<sup>75</sup>

His lawyer, Abdulmajeed Sabra, told Human Rights Watch that al-Arhabi had been detained on account of his work as a journalist.<sup>76</sup> The YJS said in a statement that they had received information from al-Arhabi's family that he had been detained due to his work reporting on the Houthis' seizure of lands belonging to the Omran Cement Factory.<sup>77</sup> Youssef Hazib, the chairman of The National Organization of Yemeni Reporters (SADA), said that the charges against him were "fabricated... political charges."<sup>78</sup>

Both the YJS and Sabra raised concerns about Fahd's medical condition in detention, stating that he suffers from "severe chest infections, blood and intestinal inflammations, joint pain... ulcers in the stomach, duodenum, and colon... [and] prostate issues and an enlarged heart muscle."<sup>79</sup> Fahd was released on February 19, 2025, according to the syndicate.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> This account based on a Human Rights Watch interview with one of al-Nabhi's relatives.

<sup>75</sup> Yemeni Journalists Syndicate, Facebook post, June 18, 2024, [https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=1046645117508113&id=100064879022605](https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1046645117508113&id=100064879022605).

<sup>76</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Abdulmajeed Sabra, lawyer, January 2025.

<sup>77</sup> Yemen Journalist Syndicate, Facebook post, August 24, 2024, [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=pfbido2sYveYMz5c1BUhhDVqtMmQ9oJ7YiUksZpWHFYQTWpHzdnNoAagMLaQgBbYU16xqpdl&id=100064879022605](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbido2sYveYMz5c1BUhhDVqtMmQ9oJ7YiUksZpWHFYQTWpHzdnNoAagMLaQgBbYU16xqpdl&id=100064879022605).

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Youssef Hazib, chairman of SADA Organization, remote interviews, January-December 9, 2024; Abdulmajeed Sabra indicated the same thing in an interview with Human Rights Watch on January 7, 2025.

<sup>79</sup> Yemeni Journalists Syndicate, Facebook post, October 16, 2024, [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=pfbido2LwRBGPuxCEA3sSWSzYESfaWhSomSK73QRxbiU9Jzjki8GppAveGNn6ZBmuyYbtfl&id=100064879022605](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbido2LwRBGPuxCEA3sSWSzYESfaWhSomSK73QRxbiU9Jzjki8GppAveGNn6ZBmuyYbtfl&id=100064879022605); Human Rights Watch remote interview with lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra, January 7, 2025.

<sup>80</sup> Yemeni Journalists Syndicate. Facebook post, February 19, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1FnipUWfug/>.

This is not the first time the Houthis detained al-Arhabi. According to the International Federation of Journalists, the Houthis had arrested him in July 2021 after he posted a criticism of a Houthi attack in Amran on his Facebook page.<sup>81</sup>

*Ahmed Maher, Detained and Disappeared on August 6, 2022, by Southern Transitional Council Forces*

On August 6th, 2022, Ahmed Maher, a journalist based in Aden, along with his brother Mayas Maher, were arrested and brought to the Southern Transitional Council (STC)-controlled Dar Sa'ad police station in Aden. Though Mayas was released four months later, Ahmed was not released until January 18, 2025.

Human Rights Watch spoke with Mayas and Ahmed about their arrests and subsequent detentions.

Both brothers stated that they had not been presented with an arrest warrant upon their arrest, and that they had been disappeared, unable to contact their families to let them know where they were.<sup>82</sup> Ahmed stated that only later, once they had arrived at the police station, did authorities tell him that he had been arrested on “official orders from the STC” because he had “spoken badly about the STC and the people of al-Dhale” (where the STC’s president, Aidroos al-Zubaidi, is from).<sup>83</sup> Ahmed and Mayas were subsequently held in the police station for over one month, during which time they said they were severely tortured and denied family visits or access to a lawyer.<sup>84</sup>

According to Ahmed, authorities subjected him to beatings, waterboarding, and electric shocks, and threatened his family members, including his wife and infant daughter, until he “confessed.”<sup>85</sup> His brother Mayas said, “After a month [in detention], I was able to see Ahmed, and I saw the traces of torture on his body and he told me what they had done to

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<sup>81</sup> International Federation of Journalists, “Yemen: Journalist Arrested Again and Imprisoned,” June 20, 2023, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/article/yemen-journalist-arrested-again-and-imprisoned>.

<sup>82</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Mayas Maher, October 17, 2024; Human Rights Watch remote interview with Ahmed Maher, January 22, 2025.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Ahmed Maher, January 22, 2025.

him,” he added.<sup>86</sup> Mayas said that Ahmed had wished for death from the torture he experienced.<sup>87</sup>

In response to continued torture and threats against his family, Ahmed told Human Rights Watch that he agreed to appear in a video confessing to forging identity documents for others, as well as publishing articles to cover up alleged crimes perpetrated by a military leader within the Yemeni government’s forces, which was shared on “The Arab Scene’s” YouTube channel, a local news website, on September 2, 2022.<sup>88</sup> When interviewed by Human Rights Watch after his release from jail, Ahmed told Human Rights Watch that he had been coerced into the confession by the Dar Sad Police Station manager.<sup>89</sup>

Ahmed was later transferred to Bir Ahmed prison in Aden, where he said that he still was not provided access to a lawyer and was only able to speak to his family on the phone once a month for ten minutes.<sup>90</sup> He was also denied the right to attend his own hearings on several occasions.<sup>91</sup> Throughout his detention, he was also denied access to medical care, despite several medical problems he incurred as a result of the torture.<sup>92</sup>

The lawyer his family had retained for him, Sami Yassin, was also later detained and had his office raided by STC forces on November 16, 2023.<sup>93</sup> The forces confiscated documents and files from his office, including documents and evidence pertaining to Ahmed’s case, according to a statement Yassin’s family made on May 21, 2024.<sup>94</sup> Yassin’s family also said in the statement that Ahmed’s trial had lacked “the minimum standards of due process” from the time of his arrest.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Mayas Maher, October 17, 2024.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> The Arab Scene, “Journalist Ahmed Maher Confesses to Involvement in Terrorist Crimes Led by the Muslim Brotherhood’s Amjad Khalid,” YouTube video, September 4, 2022, [https://youtu.be/C35E8WOWA5s?si=e7\\_bK6POpFdVBZsx](https://youtu.be/C35E8WOWA5s?si=e7_bK6POpFdVBZsx) (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>89</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Ahmed Maher, January 22, 2025.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Mayas Maher, October 17, 2024. Human Rights Watch remote interview with Ahmed Maher, January 22, 2025.

<sup>93</sup> Amnesty International, “Yemen: STC Must Immediately Release Arbitrarily Detained Human Rights Lawyer,” March 20, 2024, <https://www.amnistia.org/en/news/2024/03/26119/yemen-stc-must-immediately-release-arbitrarily-detained-human-rights-lawyer>.

<sup>94</sup> “Family of Lawyer Sami Yaseen Accuses a Southern Transitional Council Leader of Obstructing His Release Order,” Barran Press, August 15, 2024, <https://barran.press/news/topic/4523> (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

On May 28, 2024, the Specialized Criminal Court in Aden sentenced Ahmed to four years in prison on charges of spreading false information and misleading news, and forging identity documents.<sup>96</sup> On December 25, 2024, the Specialized Criminal Court in Aden acquitted Ahmed, and dropped the charges against him.<sup>97</sup> However, even after his acquittal, authorities continued to detain Ahmed for another three weeks.<sup>98</sup>

*Naseh Shaker, Detained and Disappeared on November 19, 2023, by Southern Transitional Council Forces*

On November 19, 2023, Naseh Shaker, a freelance journalist who was based in Sanaa, arrived in Aden from Sanaa on his way to travel abroad for a training in Beirut with the Samir Kassir Foundation.<sup>99</sup> Shaker's family last contact with him was that same day, when Shaker called them to tell them that he had arrived safely in Aden, according to a friend of his who spoke to Human Rights Watch.<sup>100</sup>

The same friend told Human Rights Watch that he believed Shaker's work as a journalist, particularly covering abuses by warring parties, was the reason behind his disappearance.<sup>101</sup> He also added that Shaker's family, fellow journalists, and local human rights groups have been trying to obtain information about Shaker's whereabouts for over a year, but the STC has continued to deny that they arrested or disappeared him.<sup>102</sup>

A staff member of The Media Freedom Observatory (Marsadak), a human rights group focused on advocating for the rights of media workers, told Human Rights Watch that they hired a lawyer to follow up on Shaker's case who then searched for him in prisons across Aden.<sup>103</sup> However, local authorities continued to deny to the lawyer and the family that Shaker was in their custody, and even denied that he had arrived in Aden.<sup>104</sup> The staff

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<sup>96</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, "Security Forces in Aden Detain Yemeni Journalist Ahmed Maher," August 16, 2022, <https://cpj.org/2022/08/security-forces-in-aden-detain-yemeni-journalist-ahmed-maher/>.

<sup>97</sup> Al-Mawqea Post, "Aden: Specialized Criminal Court Acquits Journalist Ahmed Maher and Orders His Release," 2025, <https://almawqea.net/news/104759>.

<sup>98</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Ahmed Maher, January 22, 2025.

<sup>99</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Ahmed Saif, journalist and friend of Shaker, November 6, 2024.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with a Marsadak staff member with knowledge of Shaker's case, April 24, 2025.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

member added that on February 2, 2025, Shaker's relative received a call from an individual who claimed he was detained with Shaker at al-Nasr Brigade's prison, an STC-affiliated Security Belt Forces brigade in Aden.<sup>105</sup> The caller informed the relative that Shaker was being tried before the Specialized Criminal Prosecution in Aden.<sup>106</sup> Marsadak managed to verify this information and found an active case for Shaker with the prosecution.<sup>107</sup>

On February 6, 2025, based on a request from the lawyer Marsadak had retained, the Specialized Criminal Prosecution in Aden sent a letter to the head of the Security Belt Forces ordering them to allow a lawyer to visit Shaker.<sup>108</sup> However, as of writing, the lawyer has not been allowed to speak with Shaker.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid. The Security Belt Forces are an elite paramilitary force of the Southern Transitional Council.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

## Attacks on and Killings of Journalists

In addition to harassing, detaining, and disappearing journalists and media workers, many journalists have been killed throughout the last ten years in Yemen, including in likely assassinations by warring parties. However, there have not been adequate investigations to determine the perpetrators in most instances.

The National Organization of Yemeni Media Professionals (SADA) published a report stating that 63 journalists and media workers were killed in Yemen between January 2015 and December 2023, including through shootings, by explosive devices (such as IEDs, and car bombs), armed clashes, stabbing, torture and targeted assassinations, as well as Saudi-led coalition airstrikes.<sup>110</sup> The report accused the Houthis of perpetrating about half of the killings they documented, and attributed 14 cases to actions by the Saudi-led coalition.<sup>111</sup>

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the Yemeni Journalist Syndicate (YJS) have found that at least 45 journalists were killed in Yemen between 2014 and 2025.<sup>112</sup> The UN Group of Eminent Experts for Yemen have investigated two of these cases.<sup>113</sup>

Most recently, on December 28, 2024, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) released a statement that they had executed journalist Mohammed Qaed al-Maqri shortly after they forcibly disappeared him in October 2015.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> National Organization of Yemeni Reporters – SADA report, “Assassination of the Truth,” June 9, 2024, <https://shorturl.at/bYx8V>.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> International Federation of Journalists, “Yemen: IFJ and YJS Launch a Survey to Assess the Impact of a Decade-Long War on Journalists,” March 28, 2025, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/reports/detail/yemen-ifj-and-yjs-launch-a-survey-to-assess-the-impact-of-a-decade-long-war-on-journalists/category/press-releases>.

<sup>113</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen*, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/48/20 (September 14, 2021).

<sup>114</sup> UNESCO, “UNESCO Director-General Condemns Killing of Journalist Mohammed Qaed Al-Maqri in Yemen,” February 20, 2024, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-director-general-condemns-killing-journalist-mohammed-qaed-al-maqri-yemen>; International Federation of Journalists, “Yemen: Al-Qaeda Confirmed Journalist’s Execution in Hadhramaut After Nine Years Abduction,” February 19, 2024, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/yemen-al-qaeda-confirmed-journalists-execution-in-hadhramaut-after-nine-years-abduction>.

On May 7, 2024, the IFJ reported that “the Secretary General of the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate (YJS) and Assistant Secretary General of the Federation of Arab Journalists (FAJ), Mohammed Shubaita, was shot while travelling in a vehicle with relatives in the capital Sana’a.”<sup>115</sup> The report stated that “[a]n armed individual stopped the car where Shubaita, his cousin and another relative were travelling near the Ministry of Information in Sana’a.”<sup>116</sup>

Earlier in 2024, the Houthis attacked journalist Mujali al-Samadi, the owner and director of Sawt al-Yemen, a radio station that was shut down by the Houthis in 2022 (described further in the following chapter), one day after the Houthi-run Court of Appeals had issued a ruling allowing the Houthis to take over the radio station and seize all of its belongings.<sup>117</sup> Al-Samadi posted on X on January 5, 2024, stating “Tomorrow, I’ll undergo the third treatment session to remove the clotted blood under the skin resulting from the attack by a Houthi-affiliated armed group on January 1, 2024.”<sup>118</sup> In the post he included four photographs which Human Rights Watch reviewed, which show severe bruising to his right arm and bruises on his leg which he said resulted from the attack in January 2024.<sup>119</sup> Human Rights Watch could not independently confirm when the photographs were taken or if the wounds were sustained in the attack.

Between 2020 and 2022, at least three journalists were killed in Aden. In 2020, Nabil Hasan al-Quaety, a freelance journalist working with Agence France-Presse (AFP), was gunned down by a group of men in military uniforms just after exiting his home in Dar Saad neighborhood.<sup>120</sup> According to a statement that Mansour Saleh, the then-vice president of the Southern Transitional Council’s media department, provided to CPJ, al-Quaety had

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<sup>115</sup> International Federation of Journalists. “Yemen: Journalists’ Union Leader Survived a Shooting in Sana’a,” May 8, 2024, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/article/yemen-journalists-union-leader-survived-a-shooting-in-sanaa>.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Raed Ziad, October 31, 2024.; Yemen Journalists Syndicate Facebook post, January 2, 2024, [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php/?story\\_fbid=771303465042281&id=100064879022605](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php/?story_fbid=771303465042281&id=100064879022605) (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>118</sup> Mujali al-Samadi, X post via @mg70991, January 6, 2024, <https://x.com/mg70991/status/1743399851478446281> (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists. “Yemeni Journalist Nabil Al-Quaety Killed Outside His Home in Aden,” June 3, 2020. <https://cpj.org/2020/06/42860/>; Al-Mujahed, Ali, and Siobhán O’Grady. “Attack on Journalists in Yemen Shows It Has Become ‘Death Career,’ Even Away from the Front Line,” *The Washington Post*, November 11, 2021, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/yemen-aden-attack-journalists/2021/11/11/dod308cc-4265-11ec-9404-50a28a88b9cd\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/yemen-aden-attack-journalists/2021/11/11/dod308cc-4265-11ec-9404-50a28a88b9cd_story.html) (accessed August 27, 2025).

embedded with STC forces as a photographer amid fighting against Yemeni government forces and forces associated with the Islah Party in Abyan prior to his death.<sup>121</sup>

In November 2021, journalist Rasha al-Harazi was killed by a car bomb in Aden.<sup>122</sup> She was pregnant at the time, and was with her husband and fellow journalist, Mahmoud al-Utmi, who was injured in the attack.<sup>123</sup> The UN has stated that women journalists in Yemen in particular “suffer intolerable levels of online harassment, often leading to attacks in real life.”<sup>124</sup>



A seminar on the assassination of journalist Rasha al-Harazi, who was killed when her car reportedly exploded in a targeted attack in Aden in 2021. © 2025 Hamza Mustafa.

<sup>121</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, “Yemeni Journalist Nabil Al-Qaety Killed Outside His Home in Aden,” June 3, 2020, <https://cpj.org/2020/06/42860/>.

<sup>122</sup> Al-Mujahed, Ali, and Siobhán O’Grady, “Attack on Journalists in Yemen Shows It Has Become ‘Death Career,’ Even Away from the Front Line,” *The Washington Post*, November 11, 2021, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/yemen-aden-attack-journalists/2021/11/11/dod308cc-4265-11ec-9404-50a28a88b9cd\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/yemen-aden-attack-journalists/2021/11/11/dod308cc-4265-11ec-9404-50a28a88b9cd_story.html) (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> OHCHR and UNESCO, “Yemen: Joint Statement – International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists.” *United Nations in Yemen*, 2023. <https://yemen.un.org/en/251273-ohchr-unesco-yemen-joint-statement-international-day-end-impunity-crimes-against-journalists> (accessed August 27, 2025).

Several months later, in June 2022, journalist Saber al-Haidari, who was working both as a reporter with the Japanese state broadcaster NHK and also within the public relation's department of the internationally-recognized government's Ministry of Information, was also killed by a car bomb, along with two people in the car with him.<sup>125</sup> Nabil al-Osaidi, a board member of YJS, told Human Rights Watch that these cases, as well as others, have “gone unpunished.”<sup>126</sup>

As early into the conflict as 2016, investigative journalist Mohammed Abdo al-Absi was killed by poisoning after investigating corruption in the oil sector in Yemen, which he had stated included links to Houthi officials, among other actors according to Qabool al-Absi, al-Absi's sister.<sup>127</sup> The UN Panel of Experts on Yemen described his death as an “apparent murder” in their 2019 report, and the Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) pushed for an independent investigation into his death.<sup>128</sup> Qabool told Human Rights Watch that the Houthis had been trying to register the case as having had an “unknown” perpetrator.<sup>129</sup> She added that as of April 2025, Houthi authorities still had not allowed her family to access the video or report of al-Absi's autopsy.<sup>130</sup>

On March 17, 2025, the Free Media Center for Investigative Journalism and “For the Truth,” two Yemeni civil society organizations, released an investigation detailing the circumstances of al-Absi's death, including evidence indicating that Houthi authorities were likely involved in his assassination and impeded subsequent investigations into his death.<sup>131</sup>

To date, authorities have not pursued an independent investigation into al-Absi's death.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, “Journalist Saber Al-Haidari Killed in Yemen Car Bombing,” June 16, 2022, <https://cpj.org/2022/06/journalist-saber-al-haidari-killed-in-yemen-car-bombing/> (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>126</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Nabil al-Osaidi, October 29, 2024.

<sup>127</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Qabool al-Absi, April 24, 2025.; Free Media Investigative Journalism report, “Black Market Killers: The Narrative of the Assassination of the Pioneer of Investigative Journalism in Yemen Mohammed Abdo Al-Absi,” March 2025. <https://justice4yemenpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/En-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%B3%D9%8A.pdf>.

<sup>128</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen*, UN Doc. S/2019/83, January 25, 2019.

<sup>129</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Qabool al-Absi, April 24, 2025.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Free Media Investigative Journalism report, “Black Market Killers: The Narrative of the Assassination of the Pioneer of Investigative Journalism in Yemen Mohammed Abdo Al-Absi,” March 2025. <https://justice4yemenpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/En-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%B3%D9%8A.pdf>.

<sup>132</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Qabool al-Absi, April 24, 2025.

## Authorities' Unlawful Takeovers and Shutdowns of Media Institutions

The Houthis and the STC have seized several major media institutions across Yemen since the start of the conflict to further limit free expression.

The Houthis began taking over and shutting down media institutions as soon as they seized Sanaa. Between 2014 and 2024, they raided and took over or shut down almost all official and private media institutions, including Al-Thawra,<sup>133</sup> SABA News Agency,<sup>134</sup> Al-Jazeera's Sanaa office,<sup>135</sup> and Al-Masdar Journal.<sup>136</sup> In many cases, the Houthis confiscated the media institutions' equipment and offices, detained and forcibly disappeared their staff members, and replaced staff with pro-Houthi journalists and staff. In some cases, the Houthis have continued to run some of the news agencies they took over, such as SABA News Agency and Al-Thawra, using them as their official channels and newspapers. In other cases, the Houthis completely shut down the institutions in their territories. Some institutions, such as Al-Masdar, resumed publishing from other locations outside of Houthi-controlled territory.

"The Houthis have mobilized all media institutions to militarize communities," said Ali al-Fakeeh, the deputy head of Al-Masdar Journal, which was seized by the Houthis in 2015. Though Al-Masdar moved online after the seizure, the website is blocked in Houthi-controlled territories.<sup>137</sup> Al-Fakeeh added that media institutions that have been taken over now "broadcast Abdulmalik [al-Houthi]'s speeches and pro-Houthis religious speeches and products trying to convince people of the Houthis' ideology... Now all [media

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<sup>133</sup> Yemen-NIC, "Ministry of Information Strongly Condemns the Raid on Al-Thawra Institution and the Publication of Al-Thawra Newspaper under Political Supervision," Yemen National Information Center, 2025, <http://yemen-nic.info/news/detail.php?ID=71364&print=Y>.

<sup>134</sup> Yemen News Agency (SABA), "Yemen News Agency (SABA) Launches Its New Website." SABA Net, May 9, 2015, <https://www.sabanew.net/story/ar/60> (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>135</sup> Al Jazeera, "Houthis Re-Raid Al Jazeera Office in Sanaa," December 26, 2016, <https://shorturl.at/1Kpty> (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>136</sup> Al-Masdar Online, "Still Occupied by the Houthis: One Year Since the Raid on Al-Masdar Online Headquarters," November 5, 2017, <https://almasdaronline.com/article/80626> (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>137</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Ali al-Fakeeh, October 31, 2024.

institutions within] Houthi territories have one color, one voice – the Houthis’ voice and only the Houthis’ voice.”<sup>138</sup>

In the south, freedom of expression has been steadily shrinking over the past four years, particularly as the STC appears to follow the Houthis’ pattern of taking over Yemeni media institutions and replacing them with newly established “southern” institutions, as well as replacing prior staff with people who are associated with and/or support the STC. Al-Osaidi of the YJS told Human Rights Watch that the STC’s pattern of taking over media institutions in the south has “risked... press freedom in the south.”<sup>139</sup>

Ahmed Saif, a journalist living in Aden, said “Many journalists have lost their jobs because they refused to work for the parties to the conflict, or to align with their agendas.”<sup>140</sup>

According to the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate (YJS), as of May 2023, nearly half of the media outlets operating in Yemen prior to the start of the conflict had ceased operations.<sup>141</sup> A study the YJS conducted concluded that the majority of Yemen’s news websites had also been “blocked from being viewed inside Yemen by Houthi authorities.”<sup>142</sup>

Human Rights Watch has documented four of the more recent cases in which the Houthis and the STC have taken over media institutions, including Yemen Live for Media Production and Satellite Broadcasting and Yemen Digital Media; Sawt al-Yemen; SABA News Agency; and the YJS office. These cases are just a few instances in a broader pattern.

## **Yemen Live for Media Production and Satellite Broadcasting and Yemen Digital Media, Shut Down and Then Taken Over in 2023 by Houthi Forces**

On April 18, 2021, forces from the Houthis’ Judicial Guard stormed the offices of Yemen Live for Media Production and Satellite Broadcasting and Yemen Digital Media, two private media companies who provided media services to various national and international

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Nabil al-Osaidi, October 29, 2024.

<sup>140</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Ahmed Saif (pseudonym), November 6, 2024.

<sup>141</sup> Yemeni Journalists Syndicate and IFJ Prepare a Survey on Media Ownership and Independence in Yemen,” Yemeni Journalists Syndicate, May 2, 2023. <https://shorturl.at/U9RF7>.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

media channels and newspapers.<sup>143</sup> The owner of the two companies, Taha al-Mamari, told Human Rights Watch that the forces did not provide a warrant, and stated that their reason for storming into the office was that they had information that the companies were “working with the enemy.”<sup>144</sup> Thereafter, the Houthis shut down the company’s offices.

According al-Mamari, prior to the raid, the companies were working under the authority of the Houthis’ Ministry of Information’s supervision and were officially registered in Sanaa under Houthi guidelines.

On August 24, 2021, Taha al-Mamari, through his lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra, submitted an appeal to the Specialized Criminal Court against the authority’s temporary seizure of his companies and properties, requesting that the court end the seizure and return his confiscated assets.<sup>145</sup> According to al-Mamari, he initially won the case, and his companies were allowed to continue working, but under Houthi supervision. “[The Houthis] were controlling every single thing... the people we interview, the programs we are broadcasting, and they even tracked our emails,” he said.

Two years later, in August 2023, the companies once again came under new legal pressure from the Houthis after the public prosecutor claimed that they had discovered new information that the companies were “photographing military bases and pass sensitive information to the enemy,” accusations which could provide the basis for the death sentence under Yemeni law. After this new case was brought, the Houthis appointed new, Houthi-aligned individuals to run the company in place of al-Mamari.

After that point, al-Mamari stated that he had “zero control over [his] companies.”<sup>146</sup>

Around the same time, the Houthis took over al-Mamari’s house, forcing his mother and his sons, who were living there, to leave. They also seized land that al-Mamari owned. Human Rights Watch received and reviewed several documents regarding the case against al-Mamari, including official documents from the Security and Intelligence Service, the Specialized Criminal Prosecution, and the Specialized Criminal Court. One document,

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<sup>143</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Taha al-Mamari, the owner of the two companies, October 16, 2024.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

which was issued by The Traitors' Properties Inventory and Receiving Committee, addressed to the Specialized Criminal Prosecution chief, demanded that the prosecution "impose a precautionary seizure on all assets and properties" of the "traitor."<sup>147</sup> They claimed in the document that they had "received verified information that the traitor Taha Ahmed al-Mamari" was "aiding the enemy."<sup>148</sup>

On September 24, 2024, the Houthis' Specialized Criminal Court sentenced al-Mamari, who lives in Spain, to "discretionary execution by shooting to death, and confiscation of all immovable and movable properties located within or outside the Republic of Yemen."<sup>149</sup>

## Sawt al-Yemen, Shut Down and Taken Over in 2023 by Houthi Forces

Sawt al-Yemen (Voice of Yemen) was a radio station operating from Sanaa until January 25, 2022, when authorities from the Houthis' Ministry of Information, accompanied by security forces, raided the radio station's office and seized property belonging to the station.<sup>150</sup> That same day, the Houthis also raided and shut down at least five other radio stations in Sanaa "under the pretext that they needed to issue new broadcasting licenses," according to Amnesty International.<sup>151</sup> On June 28, 2022, the radio station filed a complaint before the Journalism and Publications Court in Sanaa against the Houthis ministry of information.<sup>152</sup> Eventually, all six radio stations resumed their broadcasting, including Sawt al-Yemen, which resumed broadcasting on July 6, 2022.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Houthis Supreme Political Council, Official directive from the Traitors' Properties Inventory and Receiving Committee to the Specialized Criminal Prosecution, June 13, 2021. Unpublished document in HRW's possession.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Houthis Specialized Criminal Court. Verdict against al-Mamari, dated September 24, 2024. Unpublished document in HRW's possession.

<sup>150</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Nabil al-Osaiid, October 29, 2024.

<sup>151</sup> Amnesty International. "Yemen: Huthis Must End the Prosecution of Journalists and Crackdown on Media," January 11, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde31/6189/2022/en/>. See also: Media Freedom Observatory, "Marsadak Condemns Houthi Group's Raid on Five Local Radio Stations and Suspension of Their Broadcast," January 27, 2022, <https://shorturl.at/fjUte> (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>152</sup> Official court document Human Rights Watch reviewed, dated June 27, 2022.

<sup>153</sup> Amnesty International. "Yemen: Huthis Must End the Prosecution of Journalists and Crackdown on Media," January 11, 2023. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde31/6189/2022/en/>.

On July 11, 2022, Sawt al-Yemen was again raided by Houthis security forces, who confiscated its broadcasting devices and other equipment, according to Amnesty International and the Yemen Media Observatory.<sup>154</sup>

On December 24, 2022, the Court ruled in favor of Sawt al-Yemen and al-Samadi, according to court documents that Human Rights Watch reviewed.<sup>155</sup> The court ruling obligated the Houthi-run Ministry of Information to re-issue a broadcasting permit for Sawt al-Yemen radio station and dismissed all claims submitted by the ministry's lawyer on the grounds of malicious intent.<sup>156</sup> The court also ordered Houthi authorities to return the confiscated live broadcasting equipment, provide compensation for damages, and to provide payment for the salaries, rent, and other operational expenses for the entire period the station remained closed, up until the date it was handed back over.<sup>157</sup>

However, the Ministry of Information did not implement the ruling and appealed the court's decision, calling for the shutdown of the radio station. On December 31, 2023, the Houthis' Specialized Press and Publications Court upheld the appeal and ordered the Information Ministry to take over the station and seize all of its belongings, according to a post on X by Mujali al-Samadi, the owner of the station and Al-Masdar online.<sup>158</sup>

He told Amnesty International in 2022: “[The Houthis] are angry with the radio station because it is not under their control. The station is 100% independent, and it broadcasts national songs that call for national unity. Maybe this is one of their reservations against the station. This is not the first time the station gets shut down by force. In 2015, it was closed by military force for 13 days because we highlighted in our programs some of the violations that the community suffers from [...]. Imagine that since 2015, we cannot talk

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<sup>154</sup> Amnesty International. “Yemen: Huthis Must End the Prosecution of Journalists and Crackdown on Media,” January 11, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde31/6189/2022/en/>. See also: Media Freedom Observatory, “Marsadak Condemns Houthi Group’s Raid on Five Local Radio Stations and Suspension of Their Broadcast,” January 27, 2022, <https://shorturl.at/fjUte> (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>155</sup> Official court document reviewed by Human Rights Watch, December 24, 2022; Al-Mawqea Post, “Court Orders Resumption of ‘Voice of Yemen’ Radio Broadcast and Instructs Houthis to Return Looted Property,” December 24, 2022, <https://almawqea.net/news/81188> (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Mujali al-Samadi, X post via @mg70991, December 31, 2023, <https://x.com/mg70991/status/1741387024974712925> (accessed August 27, 2025); Al-Masdar Online, “Houthi Appeals Court Overturns Ruling to Return ‘Voice of Yemen’ Radio to Its Owner; Judge Tells al-Somadi: ‘Go Farm the Land,’” December 31, 2023, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/287941> (accessed August 27, 2025).

about anything. I stopped most of the radio stations' programs. There are no freedoms at all.”<sup>159</sup>

One day after the court ruling, on December 31, 2023, al-Samadi was attacked by three people in Sanaa according to the YJS's statement that condemned the attack.<sup>160</sup> He fled Yemen few days later.

## **Saba News Agency, Shut Down and Taken Over in 2021 by Southern Transitional Council Forces**

Saba News Agency, also known as the Yemen News Agency, is an official state news agency for the Yemeni government.<sup>161</sup> A senior official at the agency told Human Rights Watch that the agency which was founded in 1970 was previously headquartered in Sanaa until the Houthis seized the agency in January of 2015.<sup>162</sup> Thereafter, the agency staff moved to Aden, where on June 2, 2021, STC forces stormed the office of the agency and seized it.<sup>163</sup> The official said that “the agency office, which consisted of two big, modern buildings, equipped with all necessary equipment, offices, and meeting halls were stormed by military forces belong to STC.” He added that the forces “didn't have any legal memos or warrants to justify the storming or seizure.”<sup>164</sup>

One week after they seized the offices, the STC changed the agency's name from SABA/Yemen News Agency to Aden News Agency and put up a banner on the office with the new name.<sup>165</sup>

YJS condemned the storming and seizure of the agency in a statement at the time and held the STC fully responsible for the violations.<sup>166</sup> They also called on the Yemeni government

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<sup>159</sup> Amnesty International. “Yemen: Huthis Must End the Prosecution of Journalists and Crackdown on Media,” January 11, 2023. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde31/6189/2022/en/>.

<sup>160</sup> Yemeni Journalist Syndicate. Facebook Post, January 2, 2024. <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1FTMgNMdVD/>.

<sup>161</sup> Yemen News Agency (SABA) official website main page, n.d., <https://sabanew.net/home/ar> (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>162</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with a senior official at the agency, October 30, 2024.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Riam Mokhashaf, “Yemen's Southern Transitional Council Renames State News Agency in Aden,” Reuters, June 13, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/-idUSKCN2DPoE1/> (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>166</sup> Belqees TV, “Yemeni Journalists Syndicate Condemns Raid on ‘Saba’ News Agency in Aden,” July 3, 2019. <https://shorturl.at/hxc12> (accessed August 27, 2025).

and security authorities in Aden to protect media outlets, and “reiterate[d] its call not to involve the media and journalists in political conflicts.”<sup>167</sup> The SABA News Agency official told Human Rights Watch that the agency “is a governmental institution, and the government should resolve the issue with STC to restore our buildings.”<sup>168</sup>

## Yemeni Journalists Syndicate in Aden, Shut Down and Taken Over in 2023 by Southern Transitional Council Forces

On March 1, 2023, journalists associated with the STC, accompanied by military vehicles, took over the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate (YJS) office in Aden, according to Nabil al-Osaidi.<sup>169</sup> The same day, the syndicate issued a statement condemning the raid, stating “we were surprised by the Belt Security Forces(...) storming the headquarters of the YJS in Aden Governorate, seizing it and terrorizing the branch’s administrative body and the premises employees.”<sup>170</sup>

According to RSF, “After taking control of the building, members of the Southern Media and Journalists Syndicate took down the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate sign and replaced with a sign bearing the name of their own organization.”<sup>171</sup>

“We still try to do our work—writing statements and other activities—but it’s difficult to get our office back,” al-Osaidi said.<sup>172</sup> He added that the syndicate had also submitted a complaint to the attorney general, but they never received a response. He also told Human Rights Watch that “lawyers are scared to bring cases like this against the STC.”<sup>173</sup>

YJS had also asked the internationally-recognized government to intervene to restore their ownership of the building, but according to the board member, “the government is unable

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with a senior official at the agency, October 30, 2024.

<sup>169</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Nabil al-Osaidi, Yemeni Journalists Syndicate board member, October 29, 2024.

<sup>170</sup> Yemen Journalists Syndicate, Facebook post, March 1, 2023, [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid02C92vq6EqWrQvQ61iigSCwYvGrJ8oeRPbijjNMkRyezmisJUi5ZRDEUpRFbkj4H5RI&id=100064879022605&rdid=O55om2SYynaWmRBQ#](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02C92vq6EqWrQvQ61iigSCwYvGrJ8oeRPbijjNMkRyezmisJUi5ZRDEUpRFbkj4H5RI&id=100064879022605&rdid=O55om2SYynaWmRBQ#) (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>171</sup> Reporters Without Borders, “Southern Separatists Storm Yemeni Journalists Syndicate’s Headquarters,” March 6, 2023, <https://rsf.org/en/southern-separatists-storm-yemeni-journalists-syndicate-s-headquarters>.

<sup>172</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Nabil al-Osaidi, YJS board member, October 29, 2024.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

to do anything.”<sup>174</sup> The head of YJS in Aden, Mahmoud Thabit, told Human Rights Watch, “The Yemen Journalists’ Unions, the Arab Journalists’ Union and the International Journalists’ Union sent letters to the government regarding storming and seizure of our office, but nothing has happened since then.”<sup>175</sup>

Thabit told Human Rights Watch that the Syndicate now does its work “in secret, because we are scared of possible violations that might be committed against our members.”<sup>176</sup>

Another journalist said, “YJS offices were seized and taken over both in Sanaa by the Houthis and in Aden by STC.”<sup>177</sup> He added that “armed groups meant to target journalist syndicates before targeting journalists, so they don’t have anyone to stand for them or defend them.” He said this appears to be part of different ruling authorities’ common strategy to shut down independent media and criticism.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Human Rights Watch remote Interview with Mahmoud Thabit, February 3, 2025

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Ali al-Faqeeh, October 31, 2024.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

## Intimidation, Harassment, and Obstruction of Journalists' Movement and Work

Journalists detailed to Human Rights Watch how different authorities used threats of arrest, including through baseless court orders, as one of the many ways in which authorities sought to silence them. Journalists also described limiting their freedom of movement due to the risk being arrested by authorities at checkpoints and at airports.<sup>179</sup> Many described threats to their family members because of their work.<sup>180</sup> Journalists also described the challenges to their work resulting from increasing and seemingly arbitrary bureaucratic measures that authorities have imposed on journalists and media institutions.<sup>181</sup>

At least three journalists described working under a pseudonym, or changing aspects of how they worked, due to their fears of being arrested or killed by authorities.<sup>182</sup> Others stated that they had moved abroad in search of safety due to threats of arrest they had received from authorities.<sup>183</sup>

Shehab Afif, an independent journalist from Taizz, said: “Any party might target you, detain you or harm you, or arrest you, so I had to publish some reports under a pseudonym.”<sup>184</sup> He said that the lack of credit he received for his work made him feel “very sad,” after the time and effort he had invested into it.<sup>185</sup>

In 2021, the UN Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen reported that many journalists had “stopped working after surviving arbitrary detention and torture, [while] [o]thers stopped owing to threats to their liberty and physical security or to that of their families, and to fear of reprisals. Some have left the country entirely.”<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Lubna Sadeq (pseudonym), Ali Salman (pseudonym), Wael Shahra, and Shehab Afif.

<sup>180</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Ahmed Maher, Abdulrahman Khaled (pseudonym) and Emran Nasser (pseudonym).

<sup>181</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Raed Ziad, Mahmoud Thabit, and Hani Mustafa (pseudonym).

<sup>182</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Shehab Afif, Ali Salman (pseudonym), and Emran Nasser (pseudonym).

<sup>183</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Emran Nasser (pseudonym), Wael Sharha, and Najm al-Deen Qassem.

<sup>184</sup> Interview with Shehab Afif, independent Journalist, December 5, 2024.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/48/20 (September 14, 2021).

Two journalists said that they felt that authorities had been cracking down more on journalists since the ceasefire between the Saudi-led coalition and the Houthis began in April 2022.<sup>187</sup>

Ahmed Saif, an independent journalist in Aden, said, "The situation now is definitely even worse [than before the war]. We face huge risks... we try to hide our identity as journalists in our daily lives, because we might be mistreated by soldiers and member of militias if they found out that we are journalists."<sup>188</sup> He added that while hiding his identity came with challenges, that if a journalist has a public profile, "they might lose their lives."<sup>189</sup>

Al-Osaidi added "the space for [journalistic] freedom has been shrinking."<sup>190</sup> He said that authorities have been surveilling journalists, and that journalists may be detained at any moment for something as inconsequential as a social media post that is criticizing an authority.<sup>191</sup>

Lubna Sadeq (pseudonym), a freelancer journalist, told Human Rights Watch that journalists "live in constant anxiety," and cannot tell people that they're journalists due to the risks they may face.<sup>192</sup>

Saif told Human Rights Watch that journalists have two choices: "It's either to accept working with parties to the conflict and overlook their violations, or to be their enemy, and then suffer from the consequences."<sup>193</sup>

Saif said the violations against journalists have been exacerbated because neither the YJS nor any other group was able to defend journalists and provide them with the necessary support to combat the violations they face.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Youssef Hazib and Najm al-Deen Qassem, December 7, 2024.

<sup>188</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Ahmed Saif, November 6, 2024.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Human Rights Watch remote Interview with Nabil al-Osaidi, October 29, 2024.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Lubna Sadeq (pseudonym), December 7, 2024.

<sup>193</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Ahmed Saif, November 6, 2024.

<sup>194</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Ahmed Saif, November 6, 2024.

The ruling authorities' intimidation of journalists has also meant that groups that work to advocate for the rights of journalists are also suppressed. Several journalists stated that violations against journalists are exacerbated due to the lack of effective advocacy by nongovernmental organizations in Yemen – organizations which are also being persecuted by authorities.<sup>195</sup> Another member of the board of the YJS, which includes in its mandate defending the work of journalists in Yemen, stated that the Syndicate was unable to protect its own staff.<sup>196</sup> “We do our work now secretly because we are scared that authorities will commit violations against our members.”<sup>197</sup>

## Authorities’ “Lawfare” Against Journalists in Yemen

Youssef Hazib, the head the National Organization of Yemeni Reporters (SADA), said that SADA had documented at least 24 cases during the last two years in which the official indictments explicitly list journalism as the basis of the charges.<sup>198</sup> He added, “Authorities bring cases against journalists... and just keep them open as a way to blackmail journalists whenever they want.”<sup>199</sup> This includes journalists like Muna al-Majidi, a TV presenter in Aden, who received a legal summons from STC authorities in 2023 after criticizing an STC official in Aden.<sup>200</sup>

Youssef described the ways in which authorities across the country were using journalists' posts and articles as a pretext to detain them.<sup>201</sup> “Authorities [purposefully mis-]interpret journalists' posts in a way that provides them with a basis to detain them.”<sup>202</sup>

Many journalists described instances in which they or their colleagues were detained for short periods of time in relation to their reporting.<sup>203</sup> Wael Sharha, who ultimately was forced to flee Yemen due to the harassment he faced by different warring authorities as a journalist focused on medical issues, said that he had been detained by the Houthis in

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<sup>195</sup> Human Rights Watch remote Interviews with Mohammed Salahi, Ahmed Maher, Abdelkhaleq Emran.

<sup>196</sup> Human Right Watch Remote Interview with Mahmoud Thabit, November 4, 2024.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Youssef Hazib, December 9, 2024.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> “The Yemeni Journalists Syndicate in Aden Governorate Expresses Solidarity with Aden TV Presenter Mona Al-Mujaydi.” *Sahafa 24 Net*, December 8, 2023. <https://sahafa24.com/show770243205.html> (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>201</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Youssef Hazib, December 9, 2024.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Wael Sharha, Ahmed Saif, and Youssef Hazib.

Sanaa in 2022 for two weeks “on fabricated charges” after his journal, Awafi for Medical Media, released a report regarding the death of nine children as a result of counterfeit medicine that had been trafficked into the country.<sup>204</sup>

The head of another media institution told Human Rights Watch that one of the organization’s reporters had been detained in 2024 in Lahj, a governorate in southern Yemen controlled by the STC, for several hours because he was covering issues in the governorate.<sup>205</sup> He said that authorities accused the reporter “of destabilizing the security in the governorate.”<sup>206</sup>

Journalist Abdulrahman al-Humaidi told Human Rights Watch that he was detained on May 23, 2025, for several hours at the Third Military Area in Marib in connection with posts on his Facebook page.<sup>207</sup> He stated that Yemeni government authorities coerced him into signing a pledge not to publish or write about any issues or incidents in Marib without obtaining prior approval from the authorities there.<sup>208</sup>

In January 2025, a court in Shabwa governorate, which is under the control of the STC, sentenced journalist Aziz al-Ahmadi to four months of detention (though with a suspended sentence) in relation to a social media post of Ataq’s in which he had questioned local authorities’ land use decisions, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.<sup>209</sup>

A few months prior, in October of 2024, the Carnegie Endowment reported that the Yemeni government’s Public Funds Investigation in Taizz summoned Wajdi al-Salmi, the executive director of the Free Media Center for Investigative Journalism.<sup>210</sup> Al-Salmi described the summons as a means to intimidate him and other journalists and stop them from covering

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<sup>204</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Wael Sharha, December 7, 2024.

<sup>205</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Emran Nasser (pseudonym), December 7, 2024.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Human Rights Watch remote interview with Abdulrahman al-Humaidi, May 26, 2025.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, “Yemeni Journalist Handed 4-Month Prison Sentence over Social Media Post” February 3, 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/02/yemeni-journalist-handed-4-month-prison-sentence-over-social-media-post/> (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>210</sup> Ismael Alaghbar, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, “Unpunished: The Politics of Impunity in Yemen,” December 12, 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2024/12/aliflat-mn-alaqab-syasyh-mmnhjh-fy-alymn?lang=en> (accessed August 27, 2025).

certain issue areas.<sup>211</sup> He told al-Araby al-Jadeed journal that he had been summoned based on a complaint filed by an individual who had been removed from his post following a corruption case that had been exposed by the Free Media Center.<sup>212</sup>

### *Restrictions on Journalists' Movement*

Many of the journalists who spoke to Human Rights Watch said that one of the biggest challenges they face in Yemen is traveling – particularly between governorates, as well as abroad – due to the risk that they may be stopped by checkpoint or airport officials and harassed, detained, or disappeared because of their work as journalists.<sup>213</sup> Six journalists from different governorates described cases in which they themselves or one their colleagues were stopped and harassed at checkpoints once checkpoint officers discovered that they were journalists.<sup>214</sup>

Lubna Sadeq, a freelancer journalist in Aden, says that she tried to hide her identity as a journalist when traveling through checkpoints because she fears the reaction of checkpoint officials if they discovered that she was a journalist.<sup>215</sup> “Even in my passport, I was advised to write my occupation as “student” to avoid getting into trouble at checkpoints,” she said.<sup>216</sup>

Ali Salman, an independent journalist, also told Human Rights Watch that he and other journalists hide their identities as journalists when traveling between governorates “so that we don’t get stopped or violated by the military at checkpoints.”<sup>217</sup>

Hani Mustafa (pseudonym), a journalist in Sanaa and editor of an online platform that provides more in-depth pieces about Yemen, said that it’s risky for journalists to travel through checkpoints in the country, as checkpoint officers “might stop and harass you just

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, “Yemeni Journalist Wagdy Al-Salami Summoned by Investigative Authorities over Publishing Cases.” October 21, 2024, <https://shorturl.at/oNVbU> (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>213</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Wael Sharha, Shehab Afif, Ali Salman (pseudonym), Lubna Sadeq (pseudonym), Ahmed Saif and Nadeem Khalid.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Lubna Sadeq (pseudonym), December 7, 2024.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Ali Salman, (pseudonym) December 2024.

because you are a journalist.”<sup>218</sup> He said that officers “will accuse [journalists] of working and supporting one party against another, which they may use to blackmail you.”<sup>219</sup>

Afif described being scared that he will get stopped at checkpoints and be forced to share his devices, which would in turn “risk the lives” of his sources of information.<sup>220</sup>

“Sometimes we travel without taking our equipment with us,” he said.<sup>221</sup>

Wael Sharha, the manager of a media organization focused on health, said: “If I want to travel abroad, I travel from Aden airport to avoid the Houthis’ surveillance of my movements. Even then, I still feel scared to cross through STC and [Yemeni government] checkpoints because our passport is labeled with the word “journalist,” which has become like an accusation.”<sup>222</sup>

Two journalists told Human Rights Watch that they were stopped and harassed at checkpoints in Aden because their passports had “journalist” written as their occupation.<sup>223</sup> Both journalists – in separate incidents – had their devices searched by checkpoint officers and were accused of supporting the Houthis.<sup>224</sup> They told Human Rights Watch that checkpoint officers threatened them with detention and asked for bribes in order to be allowed to continue with their journeys.<sup>225</sup>

One of the journalists stated that the incident had occurred in March 2024 at al-Ribat checkpoint in Aden, which is controlled by the STC, after returning from a trip abroad.<sup>226</sup> “When they found out that I’m a journalist, one of the officers said that I’m a journalist with the Houthis. I told him that if I was with the Houthis, I would have traveled from Sanaa, not Aden.”<sup>227</sup> He said that the officer didn’t believe him and started searching his phone and subsequently threatened him with detention unless he paid a bribe.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Hani Mustafa (pseudonym), December 2024.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Shehab Afif, December 8, 2024.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Wael Sharha, December 7, 2024.

<sup>223</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Wael Sharha and Nadeem Khalid, December 2024.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Nadeem Khalid, December 5, 2024.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

### *Regulations and Restrictions Obstructing Journalists' Work*

Authorities across the country have also obstructed journalists' and media institutions' work by imposing arbitrary and cumbersome regulations that are often discriminatory against those from areas controlled by other warring parties or against those who are not actively supporting the authority in charge. Journalists reported being surveilled by authorities, being required to apply for permits and security clearances for a wide range of activities and being arbitrarily blocked from attending or covering certain events.<sup>229</sup>

According to Najm al-Deen Qassem, an independent journalist living abroad, warring parties have adopted stricter regulations with respect to journalists and media work over the last several years “as a way to control their work or at least to influence them.”<sup>230</sup>

Salman said that the “first and foremost challenge facing media institutions is getting permits.”<sup>231</sup> He said that it was extremely challenging for media organizations to get permits from authorities, and often those that were able to get them had some form of affiliation with the warring party in control of that area.<sup>232</sup>

In STC-controlled territories, the STC established a new authority to control and oversee media and journalism work within areas under their control, in addition to the government's existing Information Ministry, called the National Southern Media Authority (NSMA).<sup>233</sup>

Saif told Human Rights Watch that the NSMA “harasses journalists and media activists.”<sup>234</sup> He added the authority “prevents journalists who do not belong to [the STC] from showing up in media and television interviews and only allow journalists that they choose.”<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Raed Ziad, Ali Salman (pseudonym), and Youssef Hazib.

<sup>230</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Najm al-Deen Qassem, December 7, 2024.

<sup>231</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Ali Salman (pseudonym), December 7, 2024.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Ahmed Saif, Ali Salman (pseudonym), and Emran Nasser (pseudonym).

<sup>234</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Ahmed Saif, November 6, 2024.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

Saif, who had previously worked in STC-controlled territories, said that “no one can work in the south [referring to STC-controlled territories] without getting permits from NSMA”.<sup>236</sup> Ahmed said that STC refuse to give permits to northern media organization and northern journalists.<sup>237</sup> He said that the NSMA had not given him a permit because he was from a Houthi-controlled area of Yemen.<sup>238</sup> “I tried to convince them that I don’t constitute any risk to them and asked them to look at my work to see how professional it is, but it didn’t work,” he said.<sup>239</sup>

On August 20, 2023, the STC-affiliated Southern Journalists and Media Professionals Syndicate published news that NSMA started printing IDs for journalists and media workers that distinguish between “southern” and “non-southern” workers.<sup>240</sup>

Journalists and media institutions in territories controlled by the Yemeni government also face obstruction to their work. In Marib, local authorities have imposed significant restrictions on media institutions and journalists’ work, in addition to surveilling journalists and media activists.

Youssef Hazib, the head of SADA, stated that media organizations and journalists cannot carry out their work before first getting security approvals from the authorities in Marib.<sup>241</sup>



Identification documents issued by NASM for journalists: blue for southern journalists and red for non-southern journalists. © 2025 NASM

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Ali Salman (pseudonym), December 7, 2024

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Southern Journalists and Media Syndicate, “The National Media Authority Launches Procedures to Regulate Media Work in the Capital, Aden,” August 20, 2023, <https://sjmsaden.com/archives/2067>, (accessed August 27, 2025).

<sup>241</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Youssef Hazib, December 9, 2024.

However, he said that these approvals are not easy to get and are required for any activity they want to undertake.<sup>242</sup> “There are no clear or straightforward procedures to acquire the required security clearance before [an event]. It has exhausted us as journalists and limited our work.”<sup>243</sup>

At least two other journalists confirmed the security approval imposed by authorities in Marib.<sup>244</sup> Though Hazib said that several journalists had raised this issue with authorities in the hopes that authorities would provide them with clear procedures and guidelines for how they should get these permits, authorities still have not provided these.<sup>245</sup>

Hazib also stated that security forces were quick to try and block journalists from reporting.<sup>246</sup> He described an incident in which a reporter in Marib was stopped by security forces because he was recording a story next to the central bank in Marib on an issue related to the banking crisis.<sup>247</sup>

Nasser, an investigative journalist living abroad, said that “the intense fight over Marib has put the authorities there into a state of suspicion and hostility towards journalists.”<sup>248</sup>

Houthi authorities have also banned all “television crews or content creators from filming or conducting interviews without an official permit from the Ministry of Information” according to a document that Human Rights Watch reviewed.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Youssef Hazib, December 9, 2024.

<sup>243</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Youssef Hazib, head of SADA, December 9, 2024.

<sup>244</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Emran Nasser (pseudonym) and Youssef Hazib.

<sup>245</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Youssef Hazib, December 9, 2024.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Emran Nasser (pseudonym), December 7, 2024.

<sup>249</sup> Abdallah Sumaih, “‘Photography Is Prohibited’... Houthi Militia Imposes New Restrictions on Journalists,” Erem News, May 28, 2025, <https://www.erenews.com/news/arab-world/ttsmzyn>, (accessed August 27, 2025).

## International and National Legal Standards

Authorities in Yemen, including the Yemeni government as the internationally recognized government, the Houthis, and the Southern Transitional Council (STC) as de facto authorities have obligations under both international and national law to protect freedom of expression, which includes journalism. Under both international and Yemeni domestic law, they also must not arbitrarily detain, forcibly disappear, torture, or murder people.

As the conflict in Yemen continues in its tenth year, both international humanitarian law and international human rights law are applicable to violations that occur in Yemen.

Yemen is a party to several international human rights treaties and conventions that protect human rights, including the international Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT).

The Yemeni Constitution and Yemen's Law No. (25) of 1990 Concerning the Press and Publications (hereafter "Press and Publications law") both provide specific protections regarding freedom of expression, due process, and life.<sup>250</sup>

Yemen's Law No. (13) of 2012 Concerning the Right of Access to Information (hereafter "Access to Information Law") provides for the right of all individuals to request and obtain information.<sup>251</sup>

The Houthis and the STC, as armed non-state groups that exercise de facto control over territory and populations, are obligated to respect and protect the human rights of individuals and groups living under their territory. The Houthis have controlled large swaths of Yemen since 2014, and the STC controls Aden, as well as other areas in southern Yemen, and both exercise significant governance-like functions. Their control over these

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<sup>250</sup> Republic of Yemen, *Law No. (25) of 1990 Concerning the Press and Publications*, December 31, 1990, [https://agoyemen.net/lib\\_details.php?id=20](https://agoyemen.net/lib_details.php?id=20).

<sup>251</sup> Republic of Yemen, *Law No. (13) of 2012 Concerning the Right of Access to Information*, April 24, 2012, [https://agoyemen.net/lib\\_details.php?id=195](https://agoyemen.net/lib_details.php?id=195).

territories obligates them to protect the right to freedom of movement for those living within their territories.

## Freedom of Expression

International human rights law prohibits arbitrary restrictions on the rights to freedom of speech and expression, including by detaining or forcibly disappearing journalists. Access to information is a critical component of the right to freedom of expression. Freedom of expression may only be restricted when necessary and proportionate to achieve a legitimate goal, such as to protect national security or the rights of others.<sup>252</sup>

The UN Human Rights Committee, which interprets the ICCPR, has said that general state systems of registration or licensing of journalists are incompatible with freedom of expression.

The Yemeni Constitution also protects freedom of expression. According to Article 42, “(E)very citizen has the right to contribute to the political, economic, social and cultural life, and state ensure the freedom of expression in speech, writing, and photography within the limits of the law.”<sup>253</sup>

Yemen’s Press and Publications Law reiterates the Constitution’s protection of freedom of expression and explicitly provides for the independence of the press.<sup>254</sup>

Authorities in Yemen are obligated to protect the freedom of expression within their territories including by first and foremost ending their harassment and targeting of journalists and by ending any formal or de facto system of licensing or registration of journalists.

Protecting freedom of expression and independent journalism is essential for safeguarding other rights and combating impunity, given the crucial role that journalists and media outlets play in documenting and reporting on authorities’ actions.

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<sup>252</sup> See, for example, UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 34, art. 19: Freedoms of opinion and expression, U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/GC/34 (2011).

<sup>253</sup> Yemen Constitution, art. 42. <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/yem127541.pdf>.

<sup>254</sup> Yemen Constitution arts. 3, 4, 5, <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/yem127541.pdf>; Yemen National Information Center (NIC), “Yemen’s Press and Publications Law”. [http://yemen-nic.info/db/laws\\_ye/detail.php?ID=6716](http://yemen-nic.info/db/laws_ye/detail.php?ID=6716).

## Arbitrary Detention and Due Process

The right to be free from arbitrary detention appears in multiple international human rights instruments. Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is considered reflective of international law, states that “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.”<sup>255</sup> Article 9 of the ICCPR states: “Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law.”<sup>256</sup>

Article 9 of the ICCPR also protects due process rights, including the right to be informed of the reason for the arrest at the time of the arrest, and to be promptly informed of any charges; the right to legal assistance; and the right to a fair trial that occurs within a reasonable time.<sup>257</sup>

Article 48 of Yemen’s constitution prohibits arbitrary detention and provides that individuals being arrested must be provided with an arrest warrant, legal counsel, and contact with those of their choosing, and to be presented to judicial authorities within 24 hours in cases of temporary apprehension.

By arresting Naseh Shaker, Mohammed al-Nabhi, and Mohammed al-Mayahi without arrest warrants and by continuing to detain them without charge or trial, and without adequate access to lawyers, the STC and the Houthis have violated the prohibition against arbitrary detentions and have violated the three men’s due process rights. The STC previously also violated Ahmed and Mayas Maher’s rights by arresting them without a warrant, holding them for a month without charge, and denying them access to lawyers or a fair trial.

## Enforced Disappearances

Enforced disappearances, in which the authorities detain a person and then refuse to acknowledge their whereabouts or situation when asked, are serious crimes under

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<sup>255</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted December 10, 1948, G.A. Res. 217A(III), U.N. Doc. A/810 at 71 (1948).

<sup>256</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 52, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force March 23, 1976, art. 9.

<sup>257</sup> ICCPR art. 9.

international law and are prohibited at all times. Enforced disappearances are considered ongoing crimes so long as the fate of those disappeared remains unacknowledged and their whereabouts unknown.<sup>258</sup> They cause profound suffering to families who can never really mourn.

The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance defines enforced disappearances as the arrest or detention of a person by state officials or their agents followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or to reveal the person's fate or whereabouts. Though Yemen is not a party to the Convention, principles set out in the Convention may be considered customary international law.

The Houthis and the STC have both perpetrated the crime of enforced disappearance by detaining Mohammed al-Mayahi, Mohammed al-Nabhi, Ahmed Maher, and Naseh Shaker (respectively) without informing their families of their detentions or whereabouts upon arrest and during their detentions. In the case of Naseh Shaker, the STC has continued to disappear him up until the time of writing.

## Torture and Inhuman Treatment

Both Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Protocol II require that anyone in the custody of a party to the conflict be protected against “violence to life of persons,” in particular murder, mutilation, and torture.<sup>259</sup> The provisions also bar “outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment.” Similarly, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) specifically bars torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> UN OHCHR, “Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances General Comment on Enforced Disappearance as a Continuous Crime,” n.d., <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Disappearances/GC-EDCC.pdf>.

<sup>259</sup> See art. 4 of Protocol II and Convention (I) for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field of 12 August 1949, available at <https://www.icrc.org/ihl/WebART/365-570006>.

<sup>260</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 52, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force March 23, 1976, art. 7. See also ICCPR, art. 10, which provides that persons deprived of liberty “shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person.”

Torture is also a war crime under international humanitarian law in all conflicts.<sup>261</sup> Both international human rights law and international humanitarian law require that cases of torture and other ill-treatment be investigated, and that, when the evidence warrants it, the perpetrators be prosecuted. Detainees must be provided with adequate food, water, clothing, shelter, and medical care.

The Yemeni constitution provides prohibits “[p]hysical punishment and inhumane treatment during arrest, detention or imprisonment are prohibited.

The ICCPR provides that “all persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person.”<sup>262</sup> The UN has adopted standards that provide authoritative guidance on the treatment of detainees, including the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), the Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners, the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention, and the Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules). These international standards articulate the minimally acceptable conditions in detention, including basic standards of hygiene, provision of food, access to medical care, the separation of men from women and children from adults, access to natural light and fresh air, and recreation.<sup>263</sup>

Regarding medical care, the UN Human Rights Committee has noted that “decisions regarding the detention of migrants must also take into account the effect of the detention on their physical or mental health.”<sup>264</sup> Governments have an obligation to ensure medical care for prisoners at least equivalent to that available to the general population.

While Human Rights Watch does not have complete information regarding the conditions in which Mohammed al-Mayahi, Mohammed al-Nabhi, or Naseh Shaker are being held,

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<sup>261</sup> See, for example, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), entered into force on July 1, 2002, art. 7. Note that as of time of writing, Yemen is not a member of the Rome Statute.

<sup>262</sup> ICCPR, art. 10.

<sup>263</sup> UN General Assembly, United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), A/Res/70/175, January 8, 2016; UN General Assembly, Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners, Resolution A/Res/45/111, December 14, 1990; UN General Assembly, Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons Under any form of Detention or Imprisonment, A/Res/43/173, December 9, 1988.

<sup>264</sup> UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 35, para. 18.

Ahmed Maher and other journalists who have been released, as well as other individuals who have been detained by the STC and the Houthis in Yemen, have reported being tortured extensively. Other former detainees have also reported torture by other authorities in Yemen.

## Murder

The right to life is a core international human right.

Governments are obligated to protect these rights effectively, including by taking adequate preventive measures to protect individuals from reasonably foreseeable threats to their lives from non-state actors, including criminals, organized crime, and armed groups.<sup>265</sup> As part of this obligation, governments need to disband irregular armed groups that are responsible for deprivations of life.<sup>266</sup>

Governments are also obligated to ensure effective remedies for victims of violations of human rights.<sup>267</sup> This includes effectively, promptly, thoroughly and impartially investigating violations and holding those responsible abuses to account as well as ensuring access to justice and reparations for the victims.<sup>268</sup>

During armed conflicts, all parties to the conflict, whether state forces or non-state armed groups, are bound by applicable international humanitarian law. Individuals who commit serious violations of the laws of war with criminal intent—intentionally or recklessly—are

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<sup>265</sup> See, for example, UN Human Rights Committee, “General Comment No. 36, on article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on the right to life,” UN Doc. CCPR/C/CG/36, September 3, 2019, para. 21.

<sup>266</sup> See, for example, UN Human Rights Committee, “General Comment No. 36, on article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on the right to life,” UN Doc. CCPR/C/CG/36, September 3, 2019, para. 21.

<sup>267</sup> ICCPR, art. 2(3). American Convention on Human Rights, arts. 1, 25. UN Human Rights Committee, “General Observation 31. The Nature of the General Legal Obligation Imposed on States Parties to the Covenant,” UN Doc. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13, May 26, 2004, paras. 15; UN General Assembly, “Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law,” UN Doc. A/RES/60/147, December 16, 2005, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/remedyandrepairation.aspx>.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid. See also Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Godínez Cruz v. Honduras*, judgment of January 20, 1989, Corte I.D.H., Series C. No. 5, para. 175; Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Castillo Páez v. Peru*, judgment of November 3, 1997, Corte I.D.H., Series C. No. 34, para. 90; Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Blake v. Guatemala*, judgment of January 24, 1998, Corte I.D.H., Series C. No. 36, paras. 91-95; Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Bulacio v. Argentina*, judgment of September 18, 2003, Corte I.D.H., Series C. No. 5, paras. 110-121.

responsible for war crimes,<sup>269</sup> which states have an obligation under international law to investigate, prosecute, and punish.<sup>270</sup> The laws of war prohibit willful killings and deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilians.

Commanders who knew or should have known about violations but failed to stop them or punish those responsible may be criminally responsible, as a matter of command responsibility.<sup>271</sup>

In 1997, UNESCO passed a Resolution (“Resolution 29”) specifically condemning violence against journalists as a corollary of the UDHR’s protection of freedom of expression.<sup>272</sup> The Resolution called on UN member states, including Yemen, and the UN Director-General to adequately investigate and prosecute crimes against journalists, and to ensure that state legislation provides for the ability to do so.

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<sup>269</sup> See International Committee of the Red Cross, “Customary International Law. Rule 89,” [https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1\\_rul\\_rule89](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule89) (accessed January 13, 2021); Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, July 17, 1998, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/resource-library/documents/rs-eng.pdf>, article 8.

<sup>270</sup> See International Committee of the Red Cross, “Customary International Law. Rule 158,” [https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1\\_rul\\_rule158](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule158); Human Rights Watch, *Selling Justice Short: Why Accountability Matters for Peace*, July 7, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/07/07/selling-justice-short/why-accountability-matters-peace>, pp. 10-19.

<sup>271</sup> See Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), arts. 86-87; Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, art. 28.

<sup>272</sup> UNHCR. “Resolution 29 ‘Condemnation of Violence against Journalists’ | Refworld,” November 12, 1997, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unesco/1997/en/112009>.

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## “We Pray to God by Torturing Journalists”

### Warring Parties’ Systematic Violations Against Journalists and Press Freedom in Yemen

Since the start of the conflict in Yemen in 2014, both the Houthis (Ansar Allah) and other authorities in Yemen, in particular the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and the Yemeni government, have committed serious human rights violations against journalists. In 2015, Houthi leader Abdel-Malek al-Houthi demonstrated the hostile attitude of warring parties towards journalists when he declared in a televised speech that “media workers are more dangerous to our country [Yemen] than the traitors and mercenaries of [the Yemeni government] security forces.”

*“We Pray to God by Torturing Journalists”: Warring Parties’ Systematic Violations Against Journalists and Press Freedom in Yemen* documents warring parties’ wide range of violations of the right to freedom of expression and abuses against journalists and other media workers. Warring parties have subjected journalists and media workers to arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, torture, and inhuman treatment. Authorities have also seized media institutions, intimidated and harassed journalists and media workers, and obstructed their movement and work.

The report calls on all warring parties to uphold their obligation to protect freedom of expression and end all abuses against journalists and media workers. The report also calls on all parties to fully lift all bureaucratic procedures abusively impeding the work of media institutions and ensure they are allowed to operate independently, and end seizures and takeovers of media institutions.

*(above) A journalist during a reporting assignment on the front-line in Taizz, Yemen, where a sniper was reportedly targeting civilians. © 2025 Ahmed al-Basha*

*(cover) A journalist mourns the death of TV reporter Adib al-Janani, who was killed in an attack on Aden airport in Yemen, on December 30, 2020. © 2021 Ahmed al-Basha/AFP via Getty Images*