

**COI QUERY**

<b>Country of Origin</b>	Yemen
<b>Main topic</b>	<b>Forced recruitment of men by the Houthis</b>
<b>Question(s)</b>	<p>Forced recruitment of men by the Houthis in the areas currently controlled by the group, including in Sanaa, Taiz, and Ibb.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. General remarks on the recruitment by the Houthis</li><li>2. Information on recruitment methods used by the Houthis<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>2.1. Propaganda and indoctrination</li><li>2.2. Organising social and religious events</li><li>2.3. Influencing of tribal leaders and local representatives</li><li>2.4. Setting up checkpoints</li><li>2.5. Releasing prisoners</li></ol></li></ol>
<b>Date of completion</b>	8 April 2019
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*The information provided in this response has been researched, evaluated and processed with utmost care within a limited time frame. All sources used are referenced. A quality review has been performed in line with the above mentioned methodology. This document does not claim to be exhaustive neither conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. If a certain event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.*



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*The target audience is caseworkers, COI researchers, policy makers, and decision making authorities. The answer was finalised on 8 April 2019. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this answer.*

## COI QUERY RESPONSE

### 1. General remarks on the recruitment by the Houthis <sup>1</sup>

According to the consulted and listed sources, the Houthis have conducted recruitment of their new fighters using various methods, including by imposing recruitment quotas on tribal leaders and local representatives, spreading of propaganda and religious indoctrination, releasing of prisoners, and recruiting at their checkpoints, while implementing various degrees of coercion, as illustrated below.

Michael Knight, senior fellow with the Military and Security Program at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, defined the Houthis' tactic as a 'mixture of indoctrination, machismo, material sustenance, and threats'<sup>2</sup>.

In February 2018, Abdul Malik al-Houthi, one of the group's leaders, instructed his militia to boost the recruitment campaign 'voluntarily and forcefully among the tribesmen', focusing on the provinces of Rima, Ibb, Mahweet, Hodeidah and Taiz. At the same time, he also proclaimed that his descendants, as well as residents of the provinces of Saada and Hajjah, should be excluded from the recruitment and that recruitment campaigns 'should only target tribal sons'<sup>3</sup>. Older sources dated 2015 – 2017 indicated that the group had recruited fighters from all around the country and of all faiths.<sup>4</sup> In March 2018, al-Houthi declared that the group would '[a]ctivate military institutions in an unprecedented way and open up more opportunities to recruit the children and men of our people to fight.'<sup>5</sup>

According to Knight, to increase the number of new recruits, the Houthis argue with 'the deaths of Houthi leaders, the foreign-backed nature of the Yemeni government, and the use of southern troops

<sup>1</sup> Also known as Ansar Allah, Al-Houthis, and Houthi Movement, among other names. See: CEP, Houthis, Undated, [url](#)

<sup>2</sup> Knights, M., The Houthi War Machine: From Guerrilla War to State Capture, In: CTC Sentinel, September 2018, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>3</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Houthi Leader Exempts his Descendants, Saada Residents from Recruitment, 4 February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>4</sup> Middle East Institute, Yemen's Ansar Allah: Causes and Effects of Its Pursuit of Power, 14 February 2015, [url](#); Canada, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Yemen: Treatment of Sunni Muslims by Houthis in areas under Houthi control (2014-September 2017), 10 October 2017, [url](#)

<sup>5</sup> Al Jazeera, Saudi Arabia: Houthi missile attack kills Egyptian in Riyadh, 26 March 2018, [url](#)

in northern Yemen.<sup>6</sup> The recruitment messages that the Houthi representatives spread are based on loyalty to community and a need to repel an invading force from Yemen.<sup>7</sup>

During 2018, the Houthis pursued what they called a 'national voluntary recruitment campaign'.<sup>8</sup> One source called the plan 'a major failure', because Yemeni citizens were not willing to join the group on such a big scale as expected.<sup>9</sup>

In response, the group has opened several new recruitment centres and used its media to reach new potential members, especially in highly populated provinces such as al-Mahweet, Amran, Dhamar, Hajjah, Ibb, and Rimah. The group has also increased their activities in public spaces such as schools and mosques in order to attract 'minors, unemployed and marginalized groups'.<sup>10</sup> Apart from young men, the Houthis have tried to reach also to women<sup>11</sup> and prison inmates. Because of the weak response to the voluntary enrolment campaign, inhabitants of Al-Hima and Bani Matar districts west of Saana reported that the Houthis forced tribal leaders loyal to them persuade a certain number of young men from each village to join them.<sup>12</sup>

According to the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen, Houthi's recruiting strategy is primarily conducted at a community level. Mushrifeen, or Houthi supervisors, try to persuade young men mostly 18 – 22 years old, but also younger, to join the Houthi forces. They focus mostly on men from the poorest families in the rural areas who have not completed their primary education and majority of whom are illiterate. Young men tend to join as groups of family or community members and not as individuals. Hunger is reportedly a common reason for joining, as it is known that recruits will have access to food. However, in 2018, it was reported that the Houthis might pay only around 30,000 – 40,000 YER [some 110-140 EUR] a month, and many recruits may be forced to buy some of their own food because of devaluation of the Yemeni Riyal and rising food prices. For comparison, the coalition forces were said to offer 1,000 SAR [some 238 EUR] a month, plus a bonus for fighting. Once recruited, recruits are expected to fight for a period of six to eight months, and after returning home, they are not allowed to keep their weapon.<sup>13</sup> In case of death, the group also pays the same amount of 30 000 YER to the family of the deceased, through its affiliated 'Martyrs' Foundation'.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Knights, M., The Houthi War Machine: From Guerrilla War to State Capture, In: CTCSentinel, September 2018, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>7</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Yemen: \$70 a Month for Houthi Recruits, 25 August 2018, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Yemen's war: Four years on, what Houthi rule looks like, 26 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>8</sup> Haaretz, 'Join a Holy War Against Jews:' Yemeni Rebels Induct 18,000 Child Soldiers, 19 December 2018, [url](#)

<sup>9</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Houthis Attempt to Attract New Members, Recruit Convicted Murderers, 26 February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>10</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Low Voluntary Recruitment Rate Alarms Houthis, 17 January 2018, [url](#)

<sup>11</sup> For more information on the recruitment of women by the Houthis, see: Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Yemen: Treatment of Sunni Muslims by Houthis in areas under Houthi control (2014-September 2017), 10 October 2017, [url](#); FARAS, Why Are the Houthis Recruiting Female Militants?, 16 October 2017, [url](#); MEMO, Yemen's Houthis recruit women to fight, 9 May 2017, [url](#)

<sup>12</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Low Voluntary Recruitment Rate Alarms Houthis, 17 January 2018, [url](#)

<sup>13</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 25 January 2019 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen addressed to the President of the Security Council, 25 January 2019, [url](#), p. 82

<sup>14</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Yemen: \$70 a Month for Houthi Recruits, 25 August 2018, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Yemen's war: Four years on, what Houthi rule looks like, 26 March 2019, [url](#)



Information on what happens directly after the recruitment is scarce amongst consulted and listed sources.

One source indicates that after arriving in the Houthi training camps, formal training starts with playing of videos in which Abdul Malik al-Houthi talks to the new recruits directly and motivates them to fight. A local resident in Hajjah described that '[t]he group exploited the unemployment rate among young people and initially pushed them to enroll in its sectarian teachings, hiding them in unknown places for periods ranging from one to two weeks,' adding that the new recruits are 'brainwashed during the process.'<sup>15</sup> In 2018, the group deceived young graduates in Saana and other provinces, saying that they will be enrolled in military and security faculties under their jurisdiction. However, they were reportedly pushed into the battlefields after 3 months.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. Information on recruitment methods used by the Houthis

### 2.1 Propaganda and indoctrination

The Houthis adhere to Zaidism, a Shiite Islam sect distinct from Twelver Shiism practiced in Iran, Iraq and other countries.<sup>17</sup> The group has portrayed themselves as the defenders of Yemeni national rights against foreign intervention led by Saudi Arabia, seen as a traditional enemy of Yemen.<sup>18</sup> Zaidis traditionally see themselves as fighters against corruption.<sup>19</sup> The movement is known for its anti-American and anti-Semitic rhetoric, embodied in their slogan: 'God is great! Death to America! Death to Israel! Curse upon the Jews! Victory to Islam!'<sup>20</sup> Houthi TV channel al-Masira has been used to spread messages by the group's leader Abdul Malik al-Houthi, praising death and martyrdom.<sup>21</sup> The group has also used Twitter, YouTube channels and various websites to disseminate their messages, and to conduct online recruiting.<sup>22</sup> Amongst web pages previously used by the Houthis belong al-Menpar, New Omma, and Sada Online.<sup>23</sup>

One source indicates that Mahdi al-Mashat, President of the Houthi self-proclaimed Supreme Political Council had given orders to disseminate fake news about the extent of their battle victories, as well as stories about 'honor-provoking cases' and 'purported incidents and abuses', in a hope of an increased youth recruitment.<sup>24</sup> Trying to create a sense of obligation among the supporters, Houthis

<sup>15</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Yemen: \$70 a Month for Houthi Recruits, 25 August 2018, [url](#)

<sup>16</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Yemen: \$70 a Month for Houthi Recruits, 25 August 2018, [url](#)

<sup>17</sup> BBC News, Yemen Crisis: Who is Fighting Whom?, 26 March 2015, [url](#); Brookings, Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?, 18 December 2017, [url](#)

<sup>18</sup> Al Monitor, Four years on, Yemen war remains Saudi Arabia's albatross, 21 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>19</sup> Brookings, Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?, 18 December 2017, [url](#)

<sup>20</sup> Reuters, Yemen Houthis Launch 'Martyr' Videos to Raise Morale, 9 March 2015, [url](#); BBC News, The rise of Yemen's Houthi rebels, 28 February 2015, [url](#)

<sup>21</sup> Reuters, Yemen Houthis Launch 'Martyr' Videos to Raise Morale, 9 March 2015, [url](#)

<sup>22</sup> Reuters, Yemen Houthis Launch 'martyr' videos to raise morale, 5 March 2015, [url](#); CEP (Counter Extremism Project), Houthis, Undated, [url](#)

<sup>23</sup> RAND, Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon, 2010, [url](#), p. 334

<sup>24</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Houthis Provoke 'Honor, Land' to Rally Up Recruits, 6 August 2018, [url](#)

Supreme Political Council has launched the media campaign with a slogan: 'Defending Honor and Land'.<sup>25</sup>

In 2017, the Houthi authorities issued textbooks promoting sectarian messages and jihadi extremism, including sentences such as 'Damnation be on the Jews' and 'America is the biggest Satan.' On 21 September 2017, on an occasion of commemorating the Houthi revolution in Sana'a, Houthi leader Abdul Malik al-Houthi's divine right to rule as a descendent of the Prophet was emphasised.<sup>26</sup>

It should be noted that the group also recruits underage men, with some sources claiming that around 18 000 of group's soldiers are children.<sup>27</sup> According to the US Department of State (USDOS) in 2018, the Houthis increased recruitment efforts towards underage boys, including imposing recruitment quotas on local representatives. The Houthi forces established local centres where young boys and men were encouraged to join them, using appeals to patriotism and financial motivation to lure new recruits. They forcibly recruited children in schools, hospitals, and at home.<sup>28</sup>

### 2.3 Organising social and religious events

The Houthis try to increase interest in their cause by organising festivals, workplace gatherings, summer camps, and indoctrination sessions in classrooms.<sup>29</sup> In February 2017, Amnesty International (AI) reported that Houthi representatives encourage boys and men to join them through activities such as 'prayers, sermons and lectures'.<sup>30</sup>

In September 2018, on the occasion of the Islamic new year, the Houthis intensified their sectarian campaigns in Sanaa, Hajjah, Dhamar, Raymah, Amran, and al-Mahwit. The group sent their clerics to the mosques to mobilise people, and incite them to join the militias, and make financial donations. All mosques in the regions under their control were ordered to hold sermons aimed at inciting the people against the government, including issuing of *fatwas* on the need to fight against it. The sectarian campaigns have also been ordered to be held at schools under the group's control.<sup>31</sup>

### 2.3 Influencing of tribal leaders and local representatives

During the conflict in Yemen, tribes have played a significant role either supporting or resisting the Houthis. While the Houthis managed to establish cooperation with many tribal organisations affiliated

<sup>25</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Houthis Provoke 'Honor, Land' to Rally Up Recruits, 6 August 2018, [url](#)

<sup>26</sup> USDOS, International Religious Freedom Report for 2017 - Yemen, 29 May 2018, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>27</sup> For more information on the recruitment of children in Yemen, see, for example: Asharq Al-Awsat, Houthis Acknowledge Recruiting 18,000 Child Soldiers in Yemen, 20 December 2018, [url](#); Egypt Today, Video - Yemeni children reveal secrets of Houthi camps recruitment: rape, drug abuse, 27 December 2018, [url](#); Gulf News, How Al Houthis recruit and indoctrinate child soldiers, 19 December 2018, [url](#); Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Watch Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Yemen, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

<sup>28</sup> USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2018 - Yemen, 13 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>29</sup> Knights, M., The Houthi War Machine: From Guerrilla War to State Capture, In: CTC Sentinel, September 2018, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>30</sup> AI, Yemen: Huthi forces recruiting child soldiers for front-line combat, 28 February 2017, [url](#)

<sup>31</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Houthis in Yemen Intensify Sectarian Campaigns to Recruit New Members, 11 September 2018, [url](#)

with former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, other tribes have been against the Houthis, mostly in the south and central areas of the country.<sup>32</sup>

AI reported already in February 2017 that the group had imposed recruitment quotas on local representatives, in some cases accompanied by threats.<sup>33</sup>

According to local tribal sources interviewed by Asharq Al-Awsat, Houthi militias offered money and positions to tribal leaders in order to increase the recruitment of fighters. The group tried to lure dozens of tribal leaders in the provinces of Sanaa, Amran and Dhamar to join them, by offering them cash, weapons and various positions, including in the Shura Council and in local councils. In al-Bayda province, 18 tribal figures were appointed as governor's deputies. Tribes not loyal to the group were warned that they would lose their influence if the areas where they live will come under the control of the Saudi-led coalition.<sup>34</sup>

In September 2018, on the occasion of the Islamic new year, Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, one of the militias' top officials, met with some 20 elders and tribal leaders from the Abs district, in the Hajjah province, urging them to encourage their relatives to join the fight and counter the advances of the coalition in the district. He promised them weapons and chance to join the militia ranks, while also warning them of reprisals by the coalition if they liberate the district.<sup>35</sup>

In March 2019, it was reported that the Houthis were involved in increasing number of conflicts with local tribal forces in the territories under the group's control.<sup>36</sup> For example, in Al Husha district of Ad Dali governorate, Houthi forces initiated clashes with local tribesmen after blowing up the house of a tribal leader Abdul-Jaleel Al Hothaiyfi accused of collaborating with the Saudi coalition.<sup>37</sup> The group's reputation has been further hurt among the tribes as a result of fighting the Hajour tribes in the northern province of Hajjah, near the Saudi border in early 2019.<sup>38</sup>

## 2.4 Setting up checkpoints

Houthi militias operate checkpoints between the Houthi and government-held areas, inspecting all passengers trying to cross the areas.<sup>39</sup> The militia was reported to carry out forced recruitment of hundreds of people trapped in the besieged areas, threatening to kill or kidnap those who refuse to join them.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>32</sup> ACLED, Increasing tribal resistance to Houthi rule, 7 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>33</sup> AI, Yemen: Huthi forces recruiting child soldiers for front-line combat, 28 February 2017, [url](#)

<sup>34</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Houthis Try Cash, Positions to Lure Tribal Chiefs for Recruitment, 8 August 2018, [url](#)

<sup>35</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Houthis in Yemen Intensify Sectarian Campaigns to Recruit New Members, 11 September 2018, [url](#)

<sup>36</sup> ACLED, Increasing tribal resistance to Houthi rule, 7 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>37</sup> National (The), Fierce fighting in south Yemen after Houthi rebels blow up tribal leader's home, 13 February 2019, [url](#)

<sup>38</sup> Al Monitor, Hajour tribes, Houthis locked in key battle in northern Yemen, 14 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>39</sup> MEE, Yemenis brave checkpoints and mountain roads to travel between provinces, 2 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>40</sup> Gulf News, Al Houthis seek members' arrest for 'desertion', 3 March 2018, [url](#)

In May 2018, Asharq Al-Awsat reported that ‘Yemeni military sources said Houthis are using checkpoints to terrorise citizens and recruit young men by force of arms.’<sup>41</sup> In summer 2018, many fighters fled Houthi areas and joined pro-government forces to fight against Houthis, leading the group to the arrests of hundreds of passengers.<sup>42</sup>

## 2.5 Releasing of prisoners

Due to the low numbers of new fighters joining the Houthis voluntarily, the group was also said to recruit prisoners<sup>43</sup>.

In February 2018, one source reported that ‘local sources in Hodeidah’ reported that the Houthis had released dozens of prisoners convicted of murder and theft from the central Hodeidah prison, in return for joining their ranks.<sup>44</sup>

In June 2018, the Houthis tried to violently recruit inmates held at the Hodeidah central prison, housing more than 700 prisoners at the time. After refusal, the group set prisons cells on fire and fired bullets on inmates, leaving at least three prisoners dead and 20 injured. According to local sources consulted by the Asharq Al-Awsat, those who refused to join the group had to ‘face torture and coercion’, including refusal of family visits and stoppage of food and water supplies until they join them.<sup>45</sup>

The group has reportedly recruited female prisoners.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Arab Coalition Hits Houthi Checkpoint-Turned-Recruitment Centers, 11 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>42</sup> MEE, Yemenis brave checkpoints and mountain roads to travel between provinces, 2 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>43</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Low Voluntary Recruitment Rate Alarms Houthis, 17 January 2018, [url](#)

<sup>44</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Houthis Attempt to Attract New Members, Recruit Convicted Murderers, 26 February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>45</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Hodeidah Inmates Face Torture for Refusing Houthi Recruitment, 30 June 2018, [url](#)

<sup>46</sup> FARAS, Why Are the Houthis Recruiting Female Militants?, 16 October 2017, [url](#); Al-Arabia (English), Yemen’s Houthi militia begins recruiting female fighters, 15 January 2018, [url](#)





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