

**Yemen - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Tuesday 2 November 2023**

**Information on events of 2015 including: Houthi fighting against the government; & Civilians being killed because of the conflict**

A report issued by the *Gulf Centre for Human Rights* in October 2016 states that:

“According to the Freedom Foundation, a Yemeni group that monitors press freedom, at least 49 attacks on media were carried out in the month of January 2015 alone. Freedom Foundation has not been able to work freely since the escalation of hostilities in late March 2015. By 2015, Houthi forces had blocked over 36 news websites and broken into more than 14 offices of media outlets.” (Gulf Centre for Human Rights (27 October 2016) *Let Them Speak: Media and freedom of expression targeted in Yemen*)

The report further mentioned that:

“From the time the Saudi Arabia-led coalition entered the conflict on 26 March 2015, 3,799 civilians have been killed and more than 6,700 wounded. These include at least 1,444 more civilian deaths since the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) failed to create an international inquiry a year ago.” [...] (Ibid).

Under the heading “Journalist Killed in 2015” the document states that:

“On 20 May 2015, Houthi fighters abducted reporters Youssef Al-Ayzari and Abdullah Qabil, who had both been publicly critical of the Houthis. Their bodies were found several days later under rubble in Dhamar following a Saudi-led coalition airstrike.” (Ibid).

“In 18 March 2015, Abdulkarim Al-Khaiwani, former editor in chief of the pro-democracy online newspaper *Al-Shura* was murdered in Sana'a by armed men on motorbikes, as he left his home.” [...] (Ibid).

*Voice of America News* in June 2016 reported that:

“The Yemeni government and Houthi rebels have been engaged in a sporadic civil war for many years; but, the depth of destruction and increased danger to the civilian population has seriously escalated since Saudi Arabia began its devastating aerial campaign in March 2015.” (Voice of America News (2 June 2016) *Millions of Civilians in War-Torn Yemen in Dire Straits*).

In August 2016 the *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)* states that:

“Between 1 July 2015 and 30 June 2016, OHCHR documented 2,067 civilians killed and 2,815 injured as a result of the conflict” (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (4 August 2016) *Situation of human rights in Yemen: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, p.4).

A report published in April 2016 by the *United States Department of State* commenting on events of 2015 notes that:

“The country experienced significant internal conflict during the year” (United States Department of State (13 April 2016) *2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Yemen*, p.11).

This report also states that:

“As a result of the fighting, the humanitarian situation in the country deteriorated significantly, with a reported 82 percent of the country's population requiring humanitarian assistance by the end of the year...” (ibid, p.12).

A report issued by the *International Crisis Group* in February 2016 points out that:

“After nearly a year of combat, no side is close to a decisive military victory. Huthi/ Saleh fighters are ensconced in the Zaydi northern highlands, while the Saudi-led coalition and its Yemeni allies are strongest in Shafei (Sunni) areas in the south and east” (International Crisis Group (9 February 2016) *Yemen: Is Peace Possible?*, p.ii).

It is also stated in this document that:

“The UN estimates that at least 6,000 people have been killed, including over 2,800 civilians, the majority by Saudiled airstrikes” (ibid, p.ii).

In January 2016 the *United Nations Security Council* states that:

“Since the beginning of 2015, the collapse of the legitimate Government, the fragmentation of the armed forces and the launch of coalition air strikes have created a permissive security environment in which competing armed groups seek to expand” (United Nations Security Council (26 January 2016) *Final report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2140 (2014)*).

This document also states that:

“...all parties to the conflict in Yemen have violated the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution, including through their use of heavy explosive weapons in, on and around residential areas and civilian objects, in contravention of international humanitarian law” (ibid,p.36).

*Inter Press Service News Agency (IPS)* in September 2015 reported that:

“Dr. Mona Hejres, a member of the AFHR and head of "Together for Human Rights," noted in her presentation at the event that that women were active participants in the revolution that drove Saleh out of power and that many had faced human rights crimes including killing, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, and use of excessive force during that struggle. She said that today, in rebel-held areas, women suffer greatly at the hands of the Houthi militia and Saleh group, with widespread murders, forced disappearances, kidnappings, deprivation of basic educational and health services, bombardment of residential districts, and other atrocities targeting them in the capital Sana'a, Aden and other cities.” (Inter Press Service News Agency (IPS) (30 September 2015) *Human Rights Activists Condemn Houthi Militia's Atrocities Against Women in Yemen*).

The *UK Parliament House of Lords Library* in September 2015 mentioned that:

“Since January 2015, Yemen has descended into open conflict, with the country effectively split between two rival alliances. In January 2015, the Zaydi Shi Houthi movement seized Yemen's capital Sanaa, forcing President Mansour Abdrabbuh Hadi to flee, and advanced southward towards Aden. The Houthis are backed by Iran and are allied with northern tribesmen and forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Meanwhile Hadi, with few forces at his disposal, has formed an alliance with southern Sunni tribesmen and separatists. He is currently in exile in Saudi Arabia but remains Yemen's internationally recognised President. Saudi-Arabia backs Hadi and on 26 March 2015, a Saudi-led coalition launched airstrikes against the Houthis.” (UK Parliament House of Lords Library (15 September 2015) *Recent Developments in the Middle East and North Africa [Yemen excerpt]*).

This document also states that:

“The completion of a new draft constitution in January 2015 sparked further instability and fighting in the capital. In protest at the new constitution, the Houthi's kidnapped Hadi's chief of staff, Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak, on 17 January 2015. Hadi was also placed under house arrest by the Houthi's, and on 22 January Hadi and his entire cabinet resigned. On 5 February 2015, the Houthi rebels announced the takeover of the government and the creation of an interim five-member presidential council and 'revolutionary committee', as well as dissolving Yemen's parliament. According to the International Crisis Group, the Houthi's actions in January "were widely perceived, domestically and internationally, as a power grab". On 21 February, Hadi escaped house arrest, fled to Aden and rescinded his resignation.” (Ibid).

“After Houthi advances towards Aden in late-March, Hadi called on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Arab League to intervene. On 26 March 2015, a Saudi-led coalition launched 'Operation Decisive Storm' targeting the Houthi rebels with airstrikes. The Council on Foreign Relations observed that Saudi Arabia wants to prevent Houthi control of Yemen and considers the country "a front in its contest with Iran for regional dominance". The campaign lasted a month during and Saudi Arabia also blockaded shipping and aircraft into Yemen to stop Iran from supplying the rebels.” (Ibid).

“The BBC reports that the operation has been a mixed success, while the threat to Saudi Arabia from the Houthi rebels has been removed, it has not brought about a political solution and the Houthi's have not retreated from the south. On 22 April 2015, Saudi Arabia announced the end of Operation Decisive Storm and its replacement with 'Operation Restoring Hope', aims to reduce the use of force and bring about a political settlement. In July, it was reported that pro-government forces had made successful advances against Houthi rebels in Aden. UAE troops have also been heavily involved in the coalition's efforts to push back the Houthi rebels, with press reports indicating that the UAE has several thousand troops in the country. They have helped southern tribesmen force the Houthi rebels from Aden and have been advancing northwards since.” (Ibid).

The Office of the *United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)* in September 2015 points out that:

“On 7 January 2015, the Constitutional Drafting Committee submitted the draft Constitution to President Hadi. On 17 January 2015, Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak, Chief of Staff of President Hadi and Secretary-General of the National Dialogue Conference, was abducted by the Popular Committees while travelling to a meeting organized by the national body to approve the draft Constitution. The draft was eventually endorsed by 16 of the 17 members of the Constitutional Drafting Committee. The Houthis were opposed to the draft, in particular

the division of the country into six administrative regions. On 18 January, President Hadi ordered the security forces to restore government control over Sana'a, large sections of which had been seized by the Popular Committees, affiliated with the Houthis, since September 2014. On 19 January 2015, fighting broke out in Sana'a between Houthi forces and members of the presidential guards. On the following day, the Houthis seized the presidential palace and the residence of President Hadi, who was then placed under house arrest, together with other senior officials." (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (7 September 2015) *Situation of human rights in Yemen: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (September 2015)*).

The same report notes that:

"On 21 January 2015, President Hadi and the Houthis announced a 10-point agreement, including provisions to revise the draft Constitution and to allow the Houthis to appoint new members to the Government. On 22 January, President Hadi, Prime Minister Khaled Bahah and the entire Cabinet resigned. On 25 January, the Parliament was scheduled to consider the resignation but its session was postponed; as at July 2015, it had not reconvened. On 21 February 2015, President Hadi escaped to Aden, announcing that he intended to continue to exercise his presidential functions. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister and key ministers remained under house arrest by the Popular Committees affiliated with the Houthis. On 19 March, the presidential palace in Aden came under aerial attack, allegedly by pro-Houthi members of the Yemeni Air Forces. President Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia on 25 March." (Ibid).

"According to information received by OHCHR, 1,527 civilians were killed and 3,548 injured between 26 March and 30 June 2015 as a result of the conflict, including by air strikes. Of the casualties, at least 941 civilians were killed and 2,295 injured by coalition air strikes, while 508 civilians were killed and 954 injured by joint operations led by the Popular Committees and military forces loyal to former President Saleh in ground battles. Furthermore, 54 civilians were killed and 234 injured as a result of other armed confrontations between parties to the conflict, while at least 24 civilians were killed and 65 injured in attacks claimed by Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, mainly in Sana'a, Aden and Taizz." (Ibid).

The report further states that:

"From 19 January to 19 February 2015, OHCHR documented 145 cases of persons detained by the Popular Committees. Most cases involved detention of anti-Houthi protestors." [...] (Ibid).

*Channel NewsAsia* in August 2015 mentioned that:

"Fighters opposed to Yemen's dominant Houthi movement seized six districts in the central province of Ibb on Monday, residents and officials said, bringing them closer to the group's stronghold in the capital Sanaa. Tribal gunmen and Sunni Islamist militias loyal to Yemen's exiled government took control of the areas in heavy clashes with the Shi'ite Houthis, in the latest of a series of northward gains with the backing of Gulf Arab air strikes and weapons." [...] (*Channel NewsAsia* (10 August 2015) *Anti-Houthi fighters seize districts in central Yemen*).

This document further points out that:

"A political crisis in Yemen descended into civil war in late March when Houthi forces advanced south toward the main southern port of Aden in late March and caused President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi to flee to Saudi Arabia. A Saudi-led Arab military coalition began

a bombing campaign against the Houthis on March 26 to restore the exiled government and fend off what they see as Iranian influence in their backyard. The conflict has killed more than 4,000 people and spread hunger and disease in the impoverished nation. Deadlocked for almost four months, the war has tipped somewhat to the advantage of the Houthis' opponents, with their seizure of Aden last month and advance into nearby areas with the help of tanks and heavy artillery shipped by the United Arab Emirates. The southern fighters also battled Houthi forces on Monday in the southern province of Abyan, ejecting them from the last large city in the area, Lawdar." (Ibid).

*Agence France Presse* in July 2015 states that:

"According to the United Nations, the war has killed 3,984 people, nearly half of them civilians." (Agence France Presse (30 July 2015) *Yemen blockade 'killing' civilians: humanitarian chief*).

*Minority Rights Group International* in July 2015 states that:

"The Houthis, based in the north, are comprised overwhelmingly of Zaydis, a branch of Shi'a Islam that represents the country's largest minority group and accounts for a quarter to a third of the country's population. Houthis have presented their rebellion as an effort to challenge years of marginalization by the government in Sana'a, as well as an attempt to counter the growing influence of ultraconservative Sunni Salafism in the north. The uprising has tipped the country into a state of profound upheaval and led to the effective withdrawal of government control over large parts of the country." (Minority Rights Group International (2 July 2015) *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2015 [Yemen excerpt]*).

The same document mentioned that:

"The advance of the armed group in the months following their departure from the NDC saw Houthi forces overtake a number of key strategic positions in the centre and south of the country. By September, they had taken control of a number of cities including Sana'a, seizing ministries and other government buildings, and severely weakened the leadership of Yemen's president Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. Their progress continued into 2015, with Houthi forces advancing through southern Yemen all the way to Aden, where they battled forces loyal to the president, whose government they had effectively deposed. With mounting air strikes on Houthi targets by a Saudi-led coalition of Arab states, by the beginning of April, Yemen – already the Arab world's poorest country – was in the throes of a major humanitarian crisis. As of January 2015, an estimated 334,100 people were internally displaced, with numbers rising further in the months that followed." (Ibid).

"Following their initial successes, Houthis were also targeted by suicide bombings and clashed with al-Qaeda-affiliated Sunni extremists towards the end of 2014. One of the deadliest attacks, however, took place on 20 March 2015, when two suicide bombings targeted Shi'a mosques in Sana'a frequented by Houthi supporters, killing 137 people in the first major attacks in Yemen claimed by ISIS." [...] (Ibid).

*New Europe* in July 2015 reported that:

"Airstrikes in Yemen targeted non-military sites killing dozens of civilians, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported on 30 June. The NGO published a 47-page report, 'Targeting Saada: Unlawful Coalition Airstrikes on Saada in Yemen[1]', which documents a dozen airstrikes on the Houthi stronghold that destroyed or damaged civilian homes, five markets, a school, and a petrol station, though there was no evidence these sites were being used for military purposes. These strikes killed 59 people, reported to have been civilians between

April 6 and May 11. At least 35 children were among those killed.” (New Europe (1 July 2015) *HRW: Unlawful airstrikes in Yemen kill civilians*).

In June 2015 *Today's Zaman (Turkey)* notes that:

“Armed tribesmen killed 18 Houthi fighters in an ambush in Yemen's central province of Ibb on Tuesday, residents said, in one of the deadliest ground attacks in over two months of war.” (Today's Zaman (Turkey) (2 June 2015) *Yemen tribesmen kill 18 Houthi fighters in ambush*).

In May 2015 *Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (via International Freedom of Expression Exchange)* points out that:

“Tensions in war-torn Yemen continue to simmer between Houthi militiamen, fighters for Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Saudi-led coalition, with media workers, human rights defenders and civilians increasingly caught in the crossfire. The U.S.-backed coalition, composed of Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Morocco, Qatar, Senegal, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates and led by Saudi Arabia, launched a four week air-strike that began on March 26. Reports show that in just the first month of these hostilities almost 1,000 civilians perished, 4,000 were injured, and 150,000 were forced to flee the country.” (Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (via International Freedom of Expression Exchange) (26 May 2015) *Journalists and human rights defenders targeted in Yemen during ongoing crisis*).

The same report mentioned that:

“The Houthi rebels advanced across Yemen in September 2014 when they took over the capital city Sana'a; they seized complete control of Yemen's main government buildings in January 2015, eventually forcing President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi into exile.” [...] (Ibid). “In March of this year, the Yemeni Journalists' Syndicate (YJS) reported that they had documented 67 cases of journalists being prevented from doing their jobs in the months since the Houthis assumed control of the country. On the one hand, since the start of 2015 journalists and media workers perceived as supportive of the Houthi rebels and Saleh have been continuously targeted by the Saudi-led coalition. On the other hand, Houthi militiamen have undertaken their own campaign of intimidation and violence against journalists they identify as affiliates of the Saudi-led coalition. Media workers have also been caught in the crossfire in their attempts to cover individual battles between warring forces.” (Ibid).

In May 2015 *EJ Insight* reported that:

“Fighting around Yemen has killed more than 1,000 people, including an estimated 551 civilians since the bombings started, the United Nations said on April 24.” (EJ Insight (4 May 2015) *Heavy clashes at Aden airport as fighters battle Houthi militia*).

*Voice of America News* in March 2015 states that:

“Shi'ite Houthi rebels have seized the central Yemen city of Taiz in a new escalation of the conflict in the Arabian Peninsula country.” (Voice of America News (22 March 2015) *Shi'ite Houthis Seize Yemeni City of Taiz*).

This same document mentioned that:

"The Houthi militias, who are opposed to Yemeni President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, a U.S. ally, took control of the city's military airport without a struggle from local authorities late Saturday. They patrolled parts of Taiz Sunday, with Houthi gunmen firing shots into the air to disperse protestors demonstrating against them." (Ibid).

"Hours after the takeover, the rebel leader Abdel-Malik al-Houthi vowed to send his fighters to the south where Hadi has taken refuge." [...] (Ibid).

In February 2015 *German Institute for International and Security Affairs* notes that:

"On 22 January 2015 the Yemeni president and government resigned in protest at their own political powerlessness. The transitional process initiated in 2011 has failed. The Houthis, a rebel movement from northern Yemen, reject the federal division of the country as stipulated in the draft constitution of January 2015, and have seized control of state institutions by force of arms. Opposition to the movement is growing, particularly in central and southern Yemen." [...] (German Institute for International and Security Affairs (February 2015) *The Failure of the Transitional Process in Yemen: The Houthi's Violent Rise to Power and the Fragmentation of the State*).

*Egypt Independent* in January 2015 mentioned that:

"The Yemeni army and Houthi fighters clashed near the presidential palace in the capital Sanaa on Monday, a Reuters witness said, in the sharpest escalation of tensions since the Shi'ite Muslim movement took over the city in September." (Egypt Independent (19 January 2015) *Yemen army and Houthi fighters clash in capital*).

The same document states that:

"Gunfire and explosions were heard across the city and in close proximity to the palace of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and the residence of the national security chief. It was not immediately clear whether Hadi was in the palace." (Ibid).

"The Houthis, who demand more rights for the country's Zaydi Shi'ite Muslim sect and say they are campaigning against corruption, seized Sanaa in September and advanced into central and western parts of the country where Sunnis predominate." (Ibid).

"A deal signed in September between political parties and the Houthis called for the formation of a new unity government followed by the withdrawal of Houthi fighters from the capital. The fighters have remained in place." (Ibid).

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. All COI Query Responses are compiled in line with the Common EU Guidelines (2008) and the EUAA Report Methodology (2023). This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. Please refer to all documents cited.

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