

# Yemen 2024 Human Rights Report

## Executive Summary

While there were no significant changes in the human rights situation in the government-controlled areas of Yemen during the year, the Iran-backed Ansar Allah, commonly referred to as the Houthis, rounded up more than 100 Yemenis working for humanitarian and diplomatic organizations that were operating within areas of their control. The June roundup coincided with a Houthi media campaign using a series of broadcasts with fabricated and forced confessions, heavily featuring current and former U.S. locally employed staff detained since 2021, alleging international and nongovernmental organizations were operating to subvert all aspects of Yemeni society.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; disappearances; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious abuses in a conflict; unlawful recruitment or use of children in armed conflict; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, and censorship; restrictions of religious freedom; crimes, violence, or threats of violence motivated by antisemitism; trafficking in persons, including forced labor; and significant presence of the

worst forms of child labor.

This report covers abuses by the government and other actors that exerted control over areas of the country (including the United Arab Emirates-backed Southern Transitional Council), otherwise referred to as “the parties in Yemen.” The Houthis controlled the former capital of Sana’a, including remnants of former state institutions and entities located there, as well as much of northern Yemen, where approximately two thirds of the citizens lived.

The government did not take credible steps to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses.

Nongovernmental actors, including tribal militias, the Houthi terrorist militia, and other terrorist groups (including al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula and a local branch of ISIS), committed significant abuses with impunity. The Houthis confiscated state resources, extorted the business sector, and diverted humanitarian assistance. They misused anti-corruption authorities established by former president Ali Abdullah Saleh to stifle dissent and repress political opponents. Houthi control in the north severely reduced the government’s capacity to investigate abuse or corruption.

## Section 1. Life

### a. Extrajudicial Killings

There were numerous reports of government, progovernment, rebel, terrorist, and foreign forces committing arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year.

From August 2023 through July 31, the National Commission for the Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights (NCIAVHR) investigated 74 cases of alleged extrajudicial killings across the country. The NCIAVHR found government-backed military and security forces committed 12 reported killings, and the Houthis reportedly carried out 42.

The Abductees Mothers Association (AMA) announced in April that Ali Shajia'i, a civilian from the Tihama region, died in Hudaydah while in the custody of the Joint Forces on the West Coast, a group linked to the country's internationally recognized government. The reason for his detention was unclear.

The NCIAVHR reported that on July 7, government forces stationed in al-Hadd, in the Yafi' District of Lahij Governorate, struck the house of a civilian amid clashes with the Houthis, resulting in the death of a young girl.

In March, a Houthi convoy of 14 heavily armed vehicles entered a residential area in Rada'a, al-Bayda Governorate, and fighters planted explosives in a

residence, resulting in the deaths of at least 13 civilians, including four children.

In July, Houthi armed men stormed a mosque in the village of Minjarah, in the al-Sawar District of al-Mahwit Governorate, and fired live ammunition indiscriminately, killing a man and a woman.

On March 23, the human rights nongovernmental organization (NGO) Justice for Yemen Pact reported the Houthis detained and tortured Sabri Abdullah Ali al-Hakimi, an employee of the Ministry of Education in Sana'a, leading to his death in detention. The UN Panel of Experts on Yemen (POE) reported in October that at least five individuals died as a result of torture during the year.

## **b. Coercion in Population Control**

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

## **Section 2. Liberty**

### **a. Freedom of the Press**

The law restricted freedom of expression, specifying members of the press were permitted to exercise that right only within the limits of the law. The law also called for journalists to uphold national unity and prohibited

criticism of the head of state. Government-aligned actors did not respect even these restricted rights, and the Houthis significantly restricted freedom of expression in areas under their control through violence and intimidation.

## **Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure**

Progovernment militias, Houthis, and tribal militias were responsible for a range of abuses against media outlets.

All parties to the conflict significantly restricted freedom of expression. Women human rights defenders (HRDs), journalists, and activists faced specific repression based on their sex. HRDs faced harassment, threats, and smear campaigns from the government, Saudi-led coalition, and Houthi forces.

The NGO Reporters Without Borders wrote that journalists risked abuse by the parties in Yemen, including abduction, killing, torture, or cruel and inhuman treatment or punishment.

The Yemeni Journalists Syndicate reported 17 “violations” against journalists, workers, and media outlets during the year. The Houthis and the government reportedly committed five violations respectively, while the Southern Transitional Council (STC) committed three. The reported violations included the deprivation of freedom and assault of media institutions and individuals.

Freedom House reported freedom of expression and private discussion were severely limited because of intimidation by armed groups and unchecked surveillance by the Houthis. The report cited Houthi operatives blocking news websites, online messaging, social media platforms, and satellite broadcasts. In April, the Houthis, as part of a larger prisoner exchange with the government, released four journalists unlawfully detained in 2015 and sentenced to death in 2020.

In April, Amnesty international reported that in August 2023 government-affiliated security forces in Marib seized the camera of a media producer and deleted his news footage. The producer was released from detention after signing a pledge that he would not film in the city without a permit. The report did not specify the permitting requirements the media producer violated.

Houthi actors engaged in numerous attacks against journalists. Amnesty International reported in April that five armed men physically assaulted journalist Mujalli al-Samadi, an avid critic of Houthi leadership, in August 2023. Samadi reported the incident to the al-Sabaeen District police station, but authorities reportedly failed to hold anyone accountable. Amnesty International went on to report that in September 2023, Houthi operatives detained journalist Nabil al-Sidawi and sentenced him to eight years in Houthi-controlled “prison.”

## **Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police**

## **Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups**

All parties to the conflict routinely retaliated against media outlets and workers expressing critical views and censored media outlets in areas under their control. All parties to the conflict restricted access for international reporters, as well as rights documentation bodies. Reporters Without Borders stated that finding independently reported news and information in the country was difficult because all parties in Yemen controlled media outlets. The organization noted journalists' activities were closely monitored and that anything from social media posts to published articles could result in arrest.

The Yemeni Media Freedoms Observatory (Marsadak) reported in March that the STC-affiliated “National Southern Media Authority,” an extra-governmental group, forbade hotel and event venue owners from holding any media events without the group’s prior approval.

Marsadak reported security forces affiliated with the Security Belt Forces arrested journalist Fahmy al-Alimi on July 18 for criticizing the STC. Alimi was detained for five days before committing not to work for any media outlet without approval from the “National Southern Media Authority.”

In its *World Freedom Report*, released in April, Freedom House assessed that the government historically controlled much of the terrestrial television and radio. Houthis reportedly regularly blocked certain news websites, online

messaging and social media platforms, and satellite broadcasts.

## **b. Worker Rights**

### **Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining**

The law provided for the right of citizens employed in the private sector to join unions and bargain collectively. The conflict made it difficult, however, to assess whether these rights were respected or penalties enforced. These protections did not apply to public servants, day laborers, domestic servants, foreign workers, and other groups who together made up most of the workforce. The civil service code covered public servants. The law prohibited antiunion retaliation, including prohibiting dismissal for union activities. While unions could negotiate wage settlements for their members and could conduct strikes or other actions to achieve their demands, workers had the right to strike only if prior attempts at negotiation and arbitration failed. Unions had to give advance notice to the employer and the government and receive prior written approval from the executive office of the General Federation of Yemen Workers' Trade Unions before striking. Strikes could not be carried out for "political purposes." The proposal to strike had to be put to at least 60 percent of all workers concerned, of whom 25 percent had to vote in favor of the strike. Foreign workers could join unions but could not hold office.

The government was unable to enforce labor laws due to the conflict. The



government did not enforce laws on freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining in areas under its control. Parties to the conflict often accused unions and associations of being linked to a political group or opposition. Additionally, Houthi-controlled former ministries purportedly responsible for the implementation of labor laws in areas under Houthi control did not implement the law in those areas.

Observers also warned that any civil society projects or funds deemed politically opposed to the STC risked having their activities being banned or shut down.

The whereabouts of Yemeni Teacher Club leader Abu Zaid al-Kumaim remained unknown at year's end. Houthi operatives abducted him in October 2023 after he organized a two-month teachers' strike.

## **Forced or Compulsory Labor**

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Acceptable Work Conditions**

### **Wage and Hour Laws**

The law provided for a minimum wage for all sectors. The minimum wage for private-sector employees had to at least equal the public-sector minimum wage which was below the poverty estimate. The law mandated

that wage payments depended on the terms of the employment contract. Employees could be paid on a monthly, fortnightly, weekly, or hourly basis.

The minimum civil service wage was more than the estimated poverty income level, but many civil servants were not paid consistently, and most salaries were too low to provide for a large family. Workdays were limited to eight hours. Work weeks were limited to 48 hours distributed over six working days followed by one day of paid rest. The maximum working hours during the month of Ramadan could not exceed six hours per day or 36 hours per week. The law required an employee's workday to have at least one hour of rest so that any continuous period of work did not exceed five hours. Friday was the day of rest but could be substituted for another day of the week if required for work. The conflict made it difficult to verify whether these laws were respected.

### **Occupational Safety and Health**

Occupational safety and health (OSH) laws and standards were not appropriate for the main industries in the country.

Responsibility for identifying unsafe situations remained with OSH experts and not the worker. The law provided workers the right to remove themselves from a hazardous workplace. The conflict made it difficult to determine how or whether the government responded to workers' OSH complaints.

The law obligated employers to provide health care to workers for preemployment medical examinations and for periodic medical exams while employed. The conflict made it difficult to verify whether these laws were implemented consistently.

There was no credible information available regarding work-related accidents or fatalities during the year.

### **Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement**

The government did not, or was unable to, enforce penalties for wage, hour, or OSH violations. No information was available regarding penalties imposed for wage and hour violations or if any were applied. Many workshops and stores operated 10- to 12-hour shifts without penalty. In practice, the agencies responsible for enforcing wage, hour, and OSH laws did not operate or were significantly impaired, due to the conflict. The number of labor inspectors was insufficient to enforce compliance. Inspectors had no authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development estimated in March 2021 (the most recent information available) that informal employment represented 78 percent of total employment. Various sources reported the impact of conflict and lack of effective economic policies or enforcement authorities caused the informal sector in both government-

and Houthi-controlled areas to develop at an “accelerated pace.” OSH law did not apply to the informal sector, including domestic servants, casual workers, or agricultural workers. The government did not enforce other labor laws applicable to this sector. Working conditions were poor in the informal sector, and wage and overtime violations were common. Foreign migrant workers, youth, and women workers typically faced the most exploitative working conditions.

## **c. Disappearance and Abduction**

### **Disappearance**

There were numerous reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of government, progovernment, Houthi, terrorist, and foreign forces.

The NCIHVHR’s September report stated forces and security agencies affiliated with the government were responsible for at least 159 cases of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances. Omar Suleiman Ahmed Bama’as was arrested at a checkpoint in government-controlled Hadhramawt Governorate in August 2023, without legal justification. His family was denied information regarding his whereabouts, and his son’s request to see him was rejected despite the attorney general’s directives. His whereabouts remained unknown as of December.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that United Arab Emirates-backed

forces, in particular the STC, arbitrarily arrested and forcibly disappeared individuals at two informal detention facilities.

The Houthis conducted a new series of detentions, arresting additional current and former local employees of the U.S. Embassy. Between May and June, the Houthis detained and forcibly disappeared more than 60 humanitarian employees, including at least 13 UN staff members, according to media and NGO sources.

### **Prolonged Detention without Charges**

The law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The parties in Yemen did not observe these requirements.

Local NGOs reported arrests by unidentified authorities or security forces and frequent incommunicado detentions for long periods of time. In its September report, the AMA detailed 833 cases of arbitrary detention in 2023, of which government-affiliated forces were reportedly responsible for 28 cases, STC-affiliated forces for 51, and the Houthis for 754.

Local NGOs reported governmental and Houthi security agents regularly removed some persons suspected of crimes from their homes at night and detained them without warrants, in contravention of the law.

Prolonged detentions without charge or, if charged, without a public

preliminary judicial hearing within a reasonable time were believed to be common practice by the parties in Yemen, despite their prohibition by law.

On August 14, the American Center for Justice accused the Houthis of detaining Hanan al-Muntasir, from the Tihama region, for two years, subjecting her to torture and forcing her to sign a false admission of guilt before referring her to a Houthi-controlled “court.” The center also stated the Houthi “criminal court of appeals” increased her sentence from 12 years to 13 years in August, claiming she spied for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

#### **d. Violations in Religious Freedom**

See the Department of State’s annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

#### **e. Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State’s annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

### **Section 3. Security of the Person**

#### **a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or**

## Punishment

The constitution and law prohibited torture and other such practices, but there were credible reports government officials and progovernment, foreign, Houthi, and terrorist forces committed such abuses, including against journalists, HRDs, and migrants. Although the law lacked a comprehensive definition of torture, there were provisions allowing prison terms of up to 10 years for torture.

The POE reported in October that the Houthis systematically subjected detainees to torture and other forms of degrading treatment, including beatings, starvation, electrical shock, mock executions, and sexual assault.

Prisoners in the Central Security Camp in Sana'a, operated by the Houthi National Committee for Prisoners Affairs under Abdulqader al-Mortada, endured severe systemic torture, according to the POE's November 2023 report. Detainees, including political prisoners, journalists, and others, suffered beatings, electric shocks, and other forms of abuse. According to media reports, al-Mortada was personally involved in these abuses, resulting in permanent disabilities and even deaths.

Impunity was a significant problem among government security forces, including a lack of effective mechanisms to investigate and prosecute abuse. Civilian control of security agencies was weak. There was no information that the government, the STC, or the Houthis took any accountability

measures for these abuses.

Investigations in the October POE report revealed that prisoners in Houthi detention facilities were subjected to solitary confinement in dark cells for extended periods, leading to conditions like paralysis, amnesia, and blindness.

## **b. Protection of Children**

### **Child Labor**

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>,

### **Child Soldiers**

The Secretary of State determined Yemen had governmental forces and Houthi armed groups that recruited or used child soldiers during the reporting period of April 2023 to March 2024. See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

An HRW report in February documented that the Houthis recruited more than 70,000 new fighters, including children as young as 13, since October 7, 2023. HRW interviews with human rights activists and civil society workers confirmed a significant increase in child recruitment by the Houthis amid



Gaza hostilities. According to the October POE report, the government confirmed 3,298 cases of child indoctrination by the Houthis in the first half of the year.

In September the NCIHVHR also reported instances of child soldier recruitment in government-controlled areas from August 2023 to July. The report published the NCIHVHR's findings that a commander in the government's 203rd Brigade forcibly enrolled a child age 14 in military training in Ma'rib, where the child and his family had sought refuge from Houthi attacks in 2017. The child was killed in September 2022 by unexploded ordnance.

According to the October POE report, the Houthis increased their recruitment and use of children as soldiers since the beginning of the Gaza war in October 2023, reportedly recruiting boys as young as 10, often over their parents' objections. The POE reported the Houthis used "summer camps" that promised children money and food but where children were separated from their families for two weeks for indoctrination and combat training. The POE also received reports of sexual violence, including rape, against children in the camps. The government informed the POE that in April, Houthi operatives sped up the establishment of these camps, with at least 696 open by June with 15,000 children enrolled.

The lack of a consistent system for birth registration compounded difficulties in proving age, which at times contributed to the recruitment of

children into the military.

## **Child Marriage**

Early and forced marriage was a significant, widespread problem, exacerbated by the conflict. The United Nations reported forced marriage and child marriage for financial reasons due to economic insecurity was a systemic problem. There was no minimum age for marriage, and girls reportedly married as young as age eight.

According to UNICEF, girls forced into early marriage often remained trapped in a cycle of poverty and unfulfilled potential, and married boys and girls were more vulnerable to being coerced into child labor or recruited into fighting.

According to the international civil society network Girls Not Brides, 30 percent of girls in the country married before age 18, and 7 percent, or 1.3 million, were married before age 15. A June report by the European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights noted girls remained vulnerable to sexual exploitation, sometimes becoming victims of “tourist” or short-term marriages with wealthy men from nearby countries.

## **c. Protection to Refugees**

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing

protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

## **Provision of First Asylum**

The law did not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government did not have a system for providing protection to refugees. No domestic law addressed the granting of refugee status or asylum, and there was no system for providing protection to asylum seekers. UNHCR was able to conduct some refugee status determinations in the country, although this did not guarantee individuals protection under the law. According to UNHCR, the government granted prima facie status to Somali nationals. The Houthis interfered in the refugee status determination process in areas under their control, leaving many refugees with lapsed documentation. According to UNHCR, asylum seekers were not registered in Houthi-controlled, northern areas of the country.

The government lacked the capacity to provide physical protection to refugees, many of whom were held in detention centers operated by the Houthis in the north and by the government in the south. Smuggling groups often helped de facto authorities run these detention centers.

## **Resettlement**

The government did not assist in returning or resettling refugees. Instead, the International Organization for Migration reported it assisted

approximately 3,285 migrants and refugees in the first three quarters of the year, mostly Ethiopians, to voluntarily return to their home country.

#### **d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement**

The *Jerusalem Post* reported Yahya Ben Yousef died in June and was buried in Sana'a, with no immediate family left to perform Jewish funeral rites. Levi Salem Musa Marhabi, held in Houthi-controlled detention since 2016, was the country's only known remaining Jewish citizen at year's end. If other Jews remained, it was likely they concealed their religious identity fearing oppression.

Members of the Jewish community were not eligible to serve in the military or national government. Government and nongovernment authorities forbade them from carrying the Yemeni ceremonial national dagger.

The Houthi movement regularly used antisemitic slogans. The Houthis' anti-Israel rhetoric often blurred into antisemitic propaganda. The Houthis continued to propagate such materials and slogans throughout the year, including adding anti-Jewish slogans and rhetoric into the elementary education curriculum and books. Pan-Arab media outlets reported children in Houthi summer camps were instructed to shout the Houthi slogan, which includes "Death to Israel, curse the Jews."

For further information on incidents of antisemitism in the country, whether or not those incidents were motivated by religion, and for reporting on the

ability of Jews to exercise freedom of religion or belief, see the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at

<https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.