



Yemeni Journalists under Houthis' Control



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Forum for Development and Human Rights Dialogue

Civil Foundation – no. 6337 for 2005 - Non-Partisan

Its statutes are subject to Law 84 of 2002 for NGOs and Private Institutions.

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Introduction

The world condemned the terrorist incident that occurred on Wednesday, November 10, 2021, when the car of Yemeni journalist Mahmoud al-Atmi and his wife, journalist Rasha Abdullah exploded on their way to the hospital to give birth to her child, which caused the death of the journalist and the serious injury of her husband, who was taken to intensive care. The experience of journalists (Al-Atami and Rasha) is one of the tragic experiences of Yemeni journalists as a result of Houthi intransigence and stalking since their coup against the legitimate government, where Yemeni journalists suffer from abuse, arbitrary detention, physical torture, and sometimes execution without fair trials.

Journalists play a key role in areas of armed conflict, representing neutrality in collecting and transmitting information and the image of armed conflict to the world. In Yemen, the Houthis are preventing journalists from doing their job in order to conceal the facts of their ongoing crimes against unarmed Yemeni citizens, or to cover up their human rights violations. This is an explicit violation of the rules of international humanitarian law and the four Geneva Conventions applied in international and non-international armed conflicts, and it is necessary to consider the media as protected civilian dignitaries in accordance with the Hague Conventions for the Protection of Civil and Cultural Property during wars.

This report addresses the violations carried out by the Houthi group against journalists by addressing several points: protecting journalists in armed conflict in accordance with the rules of international law, the reality of Houthi violations against the work of Yemeni journalists, and proving these violations in numbers and statistics during 2021, and finally monitoring some cases of journalists who have been abused by the Houthis.



First: International law and the protection of journalists in areas of armed conflict

The basis for journalists' work and professionalism in areas of armed conflict is the transfer of new information and news under the principle of freedom of expression within a legal framework guaranteed by all national constitutions, which are supposed to apply some rules of international human rights law. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as article (19) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, stipulates that ***“every human being has the right to hold opinions without harassment, and every human being has a right to freedom of expression. This right includes his freedom to seek, receive and transfer various forms of information and ideas to others without regard to borders, whether in written or printed form, in an art form or by any other means of his choice. ”***

1- Rules of international humanitarian law

Although there is no international treaty on the status of journalists in areas of armed conflict, some international conventions and treaties contain some articles covering the situation of journalists in wars and military conflicts, particularly the four Geneva Conventions and the protocols attached. It is worth distinguishing between a journalist and a military correspondent of one of the parties in the war (the accompanying journalist) and he is entitled to prisoner of war status if taken prisoner, and an independent journalist who does not participate in any hostilities and is bound by international humanitarian law to be treated as a civilian, and article 2 of the "United Nations Convention" on journalists on dangerous missions in areas of armed conflict" of 1975, states, ***“every reporter, newsgatherer, photographer, television***



cameraman, and their artistic assistants, film, radio and television, who are regularly engaged in the activity mentioned as their primary profession." In both cases, they should not be targeted during military operations.

The first legal attempts to protect journalists date back to the regulations on the laws and customs of land war held in The Hague on October 8, 1907, where article (13) of Chapter II "prisoners of war" stipulates that **"persons accompanying the army without actually being part of it, such as reporters and caterers who fall into the hands of the enemy and are declared prisoners of war, provided that they have permission from the military authority of the army accompanying them."** The four Geneva Conventions adopted in 1949 retained the same provision for war correspondents, specifically in the Third Convention on the Treatment of Prisoners of War.

A large part of the details on the legal protection of journalists in areas of armed conflict have been allocated to the First Additional Protocol of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions, article 79 states: **"Journalists carrying out dangerous professional tasks in areas of armed conflict are Civilians within the operative of the first paragraph of Article 50.** The second paragraph added that **"they must be protected as such under the provisions of the conventions and this right of the Protocol, provided that they do not carry out any act that harms their status as civilians, without prejudice to the right of military correspondents accredited to the armed forces to benefit from the status provided for in article 4 of the Third Convention."**

Accordingly, journalists enjoy the protection guaranteed to civilians from the hostile effects of article 51 of the same Protocol, which states: **" 1. Civilian populations**



and persons are protected against the dangers posed by military operations and, in order to make such protection effective, must always observe the following rules in addition to other applicable international rules; 2. The civilian population as such may not be the subject of attack. Acts of violence or threats aimed primarily at spreading panic among the civilian population are prohibited; 3. Civilian persons are protected by this section unless they play a direct role in hostilities and over the time, they play this role; 4. Indiscriminate attacks are prohibited...."

Protocol I also ensured that journalists were treated as civilians and, if they were in distress, article 75 stated: ***"In all cases, persons who are in the power of a party to the conflict and who do not enjoy better treatment under the Conventions or this Protocol shall be treated humanely within the scope of their being affected by one of the situations referred to in Article 1 of this Protocol. the protection afforded by this Article without any unfair discrimination based on race, color, sex, language, religion, creed, political or other opinions, national or social affiliation, wealth, birth or any other status, or on any other criteria All parties shall respect all such persons in their person, honor, beliefs and religious rites."***

Paragraph II prohibited certain acts of hostility against journalists, stating that ***"the following acts are prohibited immediately and at any time and place, whether committed by civilian or military personnel: a) violence against the lives, health or physical or mental well-being of persons, in particular: (killing- torture in all its physical or mental forms- sanctions- mutilation); b) Violation of personal dignity, in particular degrading treatment of a person, the station of his ability, coercion into prostitution and any form of indecent assault; c) hostage-taking; d) collective punishment;e) the threat of any of the above-mentioned acts."***



It is also an order for media and journalistic establishments, which are considered civilian objects that are protected and not attacked, and article 52 of the First Protocol of the Geneva Conventions stipulates that: ***"Civilian objects shall not be the subject of attack or deterrence attacks,"*** and civilian objects are not military targets as defined in the second paragraph where ***"Attacks shall be limited to military objectives only. Military objectives in relation to objects are limited to those which, by their nature, location, purpose or use, make an effective contribution to military action, and whose total or partial destruction, capture or neutralization in the circumstances ruling at the time would provide an advantage militarily."***

2- UN Resolutions

The United Nations and some of its councils and bodies have some resolutions that provide some protection to journalists in areas of armed conflict, due to the lack of following the rules of international humanitarian law, and turning a blind eye to many violations against journalists. In December 2013, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 163/68, followed by Resolution 185/69 in 2014 on the United Nations Action Plan on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, and accordingly supported some regional mechanisms by establishing monitoring bodies to protect journalists, including the Office of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Information. At the African Commission for Human and People's Rights in Africa, the Special Representative for Media Freedom of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. UNESCO is taking over the



overall coordination of United Nations efforts to ensure the safety of journalists, as well as collaborating with other United Nations bodies through the Global Fund for the Defence of The Media.

The 2016 Universal Declaration for the Protection of Journalists affirmed that the right to life is guaranteed to all journalists, media professionals and associated individuals and is entitled to protection against any human rights violations or abuses, whether in the form of murder, torture, enforced disappearance, arbitrary arrest, exile, intimidation, harassment, threats, any form or acts of violence, actual or legal negative discrimination against them or their relatives or any other arbitrary act. The exercise of these rights, such as arbitrary or illegal surveillance or interception of their communications, violates their right to privacy and freedom of expression.

It did not stop at the UN General Assembly, and the UN Security Council has previously condemned attacks against journalists, the media and associated individuals, and in Resolution 1738 of 2006 and Resolution 2222 of 2015 called for an end to these practices in conflict situations, those staff must be considered civilians and must be protected and respected. In addition, equipment and facilities used by the media were also considered civilian targets and therefore not the target of any military action. The Council also condemned incitement to violence in the media, noting that it would take further action against media broadcasts that incite genocide, crimes against humanity and violations of international humanitarian law.

3- NGOs

Some NGOs provide direct and indirect support to journalists in places of armed conflict in particular, with the ICRC opening a telephone line that is permanently



available to journalists facing difficulties during armed conflicts, and the services provided by the ICRC range from seeking to verify the journalist's arrest and obtaining access to them, Provide families and employers with information about their whereabouts, maintain family ties, actively search for missing journalists and carry out medical evacuations of the injured.

Journalists Without Borders also issued a declaration on the security of journalists and the media in situations of armed conflict on January 20, 2003, and on January 8, 2004. in cases where journalists are killed.

Second: the reality of Houthis' encroachment on Yemeni journalists

In fact, the Houthis' violations against journalists are numerous, including murder/assassination, execution, arbitrary arrest and detention, breaking into workplaces, blocking newspaper websites, or using social media sites to threaten, as well as causing displacement from their provinces or outside Yemen.

The Houthi terrorist group is pursuing repressive policies towards opposition journalists and media in Yemen, and what the statement made by Abdul Malik al-Houthi, the leader of the group in September 2014 after the coup d'état by killing any journalist who proves his loyalty to the legitimate government and violates the principles of Al-Houthis, or warning the Ministry of Information headed by the Houthis that it will work against all the media that will work against its policies, only to confirm their awareness of the feasibility and the credibility of the words that journalists write and send to the world. Yemeni journalists are harassed and restricted by the Houthis in their places of control, and correspondents in their areas are asked not to move or carry out any journalistic work except with the prior approval of their ministry of



information (i.e., the Houthis) and provided that journalists accompany a Houthi security agent to check the clips they will film.

1- Murder- Assassination - Execution

The houthi group's aggressive behavior towards journalists has in some cases led to murder or assassination in accordance with the orders of Abdul Malik al-Houthi and their silencing about the violations to which the Yemeni people are subjected to their oppression in the places they occupy. 2015, 2016, 2018, killing of 30 journalists, an average of 10 journalists each year by Houthi militias. Yemen's annual report on freedom of expression by the Yemeni Freedom Monitor stated that in 2020, 13 journalists were killed, including four journalists (Abdul Khaleq Ahmed Omran, Akram Saleh al-Walidi, Al-Harith Saleh Hamid, and Tawfiq Mohammed al-Mansouri) they have been subjected to torture and medical neglect. In June 2020, journalist Nabil al-Qaiti was killed in front of his home in Aden, and on December 31, the same year, journalist Adib al-Janani was killed in the Houthi attack, which targeted government members as they arrived at Aden airport with Ballistic missiles.

Not only that, they use journalists as human shields against air attacks by the Arab coalition, on May 21, 2015, journalists Abdullah Metb, 25, and Youssef al-Ezeri, 26, were killed after being kidnapped by al-Houthi militia and used as human shields against Arab Coalition airstrikes on weapons depots in Dhamar city. There are some cases of murder and stalking for known and hidden reasons, where in December 2015 the announcer of the state-owned channel Aden Jamilaa Jamil died suddenly in a hotel in Sana'a, and in December 2016, investigative journalist Abdo Al-Absi died in Sana'a as well, poisoned according to a medical report after his autopsy, after



publishing reports revealing the extent of corruption of companies belonging to the Houthi leaders in the prices of importing oil derivatives and food. In February 2018, Al-Jazeera cameraman Mujib Sawilah died in Sana'a after returning from government-controlled areas to Sana'a for his daughter's wedding. In October 2019, journalist Abdul Azer al-Hayagam died suddenly in the capital Sana'a, the cause of death declared a "heart attack" after he refused the Houthis' involvement in his work. In June 2018, journalist Anwar al-Roken died in al-Houthi militia prisons in Al-Saleh city, east of Taiz province, a year after he was kidnapped and brutally tortured, and in the same month journalist Zaki Al-Saqdli was assassinated in front of his home in Aden.

In 2019, two journalists, the journalist Ziad Al-Sharabi, were killed in a motorcycle explosion that targeted him, and the photographer Ghaleb Balhash while they were on a journalistic assignment, after they were targeted by Houthi gunmen. In October 2021, the Houthi groups targeted the explosion of the car of the governor of Aden, who survived that incident, but the media secretary of the governor, Ahmed Bu Saleh, died, and the same happened at the beginning of this month when the car of journalist Mahmoud Al-Atmi exploded while he was on his way to transport his wife to the hospital to give birth, but she died as a result. For that incident, investigations revealed that Al-Atami had recently received threats from the Houthis, and he learned from a journalist that they were asking for his home address..

2- Detention - Arbitrary detention

If they are not doomed, hundreds of Yemeni journalists are being kidnapped, arbitrarily detained and tortured in Houthi prisons in Sana'a, and the aim is to end their detention either ransom money or negotiate prisoner exchange deals with the legitimate



government, as the Houthi group released ahmed al-Masri, who has been detained for more than three years in a prisoner exchange deal with the evil government, in September 2021. According to one report, al-Houthi runs 203 prisons, including 78 of an official nature, and 125 secret detainees, in addition to the creation of private secret prisons in *Badromat* (basement) government institutions, as with the High Electoral Commission, to which the Houthis have transferred hundreds of abductees, and detains hundreds of civilians in four military locations.

The practices and approaches of kidnapping journalists from the September 21, 2014 coup against the legitimate authority have been constantly monitored, some of which can be mentioned, for example, on April 6, 2015, the Houthi group arrested Wahid al-Sufi, 40, editor-in-chief of al-Arabiya newspaper and director of the newspaper's website from inside the editorial post office of the Capital Secretariat. In June 2015, nine journalists were arrested from a hotel in Sana'a (four of whom were sentenced to death) where they were based in one of their rooms temporarily for electricity and internet access. On July 6, 2015, Ibrahim al-Majzoub, 28, a media officer at the Al-Rafiqa Development Charitable Foundation, was arrested from their home. On August 28, 2015, Salah al-Qaedi, a 29-year-old journalist who works for Suhail satellite channel as a news editor, was arrested. On October 7, 2015, the Houthi group kidnapped Mahmoud Taha, 45, a reporter for News Yemen as well as a freelance journalist.

Most of these journalists were subjected to the most heinous forms of torture inside Houthi prisons-torture with water and electricity as described by one of the released journalists - and from being assigned to defense and denied visits, and they are also fined large sums of money for their release, and there are some journalists infected by Covid-19 as a result of their contact with the injured Houthi jailers, and journalist



Ahmed Al-Habaishi died in the political security prison in Sana'a as a result of Corona. They are also threatened with disappearance and neutralization if they do not stop hunger strikes.

3- Escape and displacement

The great challenges faced by Yemeni journalists in places controlled by the Houthis force them to flee their cities where they live, and those who can leave Yemen for fear of arrest, assassination, threats to family and friends, and follow-up work remotely. For example, Nabil al-Asidi, chairman of the training and rehabilitation committee and elected member of the Yemeni Journalists' Union and supervisor of the Freedoms Committee, was forced to move between Yemeni cities, from there to Saudi Arabia and then to Switzerland after receiving death threats from the Houthis and the storming of his house, all to continue his free work and write in some newspapers and websites. Al-Asidi did not stop participating in many events held at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, organizing conferences at the Geneva Press Club and addressing all media platforms to which he was able to speak to deliver the voices of the victims and to identify violations against freedom of opinion and expression, especially journalists and media in Yemen, which was designated by the organization" Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is one of the most dangerous countries for the lives of journalists.

4- Breaking into the press and media headquarters and blocking news sites

Houthi militias are storming the work premises where journalists work and arresting them and abducting them to unknown places, and the incursion of the Houthi group



was monitored in the first year of the coup for at least 14 headquarters of newspapers, satellite channels and local radios, which led to its closure and stopping its journalistic and media activity. The most famous incident was when gunmen from al-Houthi stormed the headquarters of al-Thawra newspaper in December 2014, one of Yemen's leading government newspapers located in the Al-Gahf neighborhood of Sana'a, and issued a number of newspapers including statements and news concerning Houthis, after journalists and the editorial board refused to meet with the Houthis and rejected their illegal demands.

On the other hand, party and independent newspapers, official and civil channels and radio stations are forced to close and finish their work on the orders of the Houthi Ministry of Information, and to collect news sites and hundreds of press and media platforms, and the militias have closed some applications for communication at different periods. Online news publications have also been routinely shut down or blocked by the Houthis in some areas, including Marib Press, which has now been blocked in all areas controlled by HouthiYen. It also denied access to the website of the source news, and "Yemen Times" works exclusively via the Internet after the closure of its offices in Sana'a for fear of attacks Houthis, and another English-language newspaper "Yemen Post", which used to publish its publications weekly from Sana'a, has now become a news agency published on Twitter only.

Third: numbers and statistics for houthi violations freedom of the press in Yemen

This year, Yemen ranked 169th out of 180 in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), which ranked 164th last year, as general



restrictions to ease the spread of Covid-19 affected the press and the media, in addition to the coercive measures imposed by Houthi militias.

From 2014 to last year, the Houthi group topped the list of perpetrators of violations against journalists in Yemen with 70 of the total cases recorded during the year (2020). During this period, 46 journalists were killed by them and 20 kidnapped journalists are still missing, according to a 2020 report issued by the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate.

Violation	Assassination/execution	Prisoner exchange	kidnapping	Displacement	Arrest without release	Total
No.	11	2	9	25	23	70

Table 1: Houthi violations as stated in Yemen's 2020 annual report on freedom of expression

Houthi violations have continued since the beginning of 2021, in January the Houthis committed 33 violations (29.5%) against journalists, and during the first half of this year, the Houthis committed 20 violations (55% of total violations), and as of the third quarter the Houthis committed 13 violations (50%) during that period, according to reports of the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate.



The following table shows the number of violations carried out by the Houthis during each month from the beginning of this year 2021 until October, according to the Yemeni journalists' report:

Month	January	February	March	April	May	August	October	Total
No. of violations	33	5	4	2	4	1	1	50

Table2: Houthi violations during the first 10 months of 2021

There may be months where violations have not been monitored, but this number since the beginning of 2021 demonstrates the crimes in which the Houthis are intransigent in excluding press freedom from their minds, and not accepting any source of criticism and opposition in their policies.

Conclusion

Even if there are many incidents of murder, assassination, execution and violation of human rights, the one reason is that the Houthi group cannot afford to launch an international attack is the result of the free transfer of information and press news that monitors and documents its violations and abuses against the Yemeni people. For international conventions and conventions on international humanitarian law, and to take into account the interaction with journalists in areas of armed conflict.