

Report on  
Press  
Freedoms  
in Yemen

2022



Women  
Journalists  
Without  
Chains

## ***2022 Report on Press Freedoms in Yemen***

Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC) has documented a staggering 85 instances of journalistic violations in the year 2022. These distressing cases include harrowing accounts of murder, attempts on their lives, unlawful arrests, physical torture, enforced abductions, intimidating threats, rigged trials, unfounded incitement, malicious slander, termination of employment, and unjust denial of medical care for detained journalists.

Following the Houthi militia's capture of Sana'a in 2014, it carried out a widespread crackdown on media freedoms, to the extent that discussing the state of journalistic freedoms in numerical terms became meaningless in the years following this pivotal event in the lives of Yemenis. This is because the actual number of private and partisan media institutions operating in Yemen and concerned with public affairs has become equal to zero. Therefore, any discussion of violations against journalistic and media work in numerical terms would be deceptive and misleading.

Since 2014, the organization "WJWC" has meticulously recorded 1587 instances of violations against press freedom. These transgressions do not

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pertain to the general state of freedoms, which has unfortunately declined to a worrisome extent, but rather to fundamental rights such as the right to life, security, mobility, and health. Among the documented cases are 51 instances of homicide, as well as the complete closure of private and partisan media outlets, censorship, equipment confiscation, and the utilization of public media to serve the interests of the ruling faction. Regrettably, it is noteworthy that these crimes have gone uninvestigated and unpunished, as the perpetrators have maintained their grip on power since seizing it by force in 2014.

The media freedom advocacy organization has stated that, over the course of the past five decades, there has been a concerning absence of investigations or accountability for individuals who have committed crimes against journalists. This lack of action has served to perpetuate a culture of impunity, leading to an increase in such crimes and exacerbating the problem further. The organization expresses its disappointment in the international community's inability to address this issue effectively, and stresses the importance of holding those who engage in such misconduct responsible for

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their actions, thereby providing a deterrent to others. It should be noted that these are crimes that are not subject to the statute of limitations.

In its annual report on press freedoms, the WJWC noted that during 2022, it had observed (85) cases of violations against journalists, including murder, attempted assassination, arbitrary arrests, torture, forced disappearances, kidnappings, threats, trials, incitement, defamation, suspension from duty, and denial of medical care to journalists who were in custody.

Journalist Saber Al-Haidari was killed in a terrorist vehicle explosion in the Mansoura neighborhood of the Aden Governorate, while photographer Fouad Al-Wafi was discovered dead in his car from stab wounds. These two journalist killings in 2022 were also recorded by the organization. The group noted that the two journalists' deaths are yet another shocking incident in the ongoing string of terrorist bombings that have targeted journalists, in addition to a tragic incident last year in Aden city when a terrorist bombing targeted the car of journalist Rasha Al-Harazi and her husband Mahmoud Al-

utmi, resulting in the loss of Rasha and their unborn child and injuring Mahmoud.

### **Mistreatment of Abducted Journalists**

According to the WJWC, a number of journalists remain in captivity at the hands of the Houthi militia, with reports indicating that they are being subjected to torture and are suffering from severe health conditions. These individuals, including Akram Al-Walidi, Tawfiq Al-Mansouri, Harith Hameed, Abdul Khaliq Imran, Mohammed Abdu Al-Salahi, Mohammed Ali Al-Junaid, Nabil Al-Sadaawi, and Wahid Al-Soufi, are being denied access to medical care and are unable to receive visits. Additionally, journalist Mohammed Al-Muqri is reportedly being held captive by Al-Qaeda in Hadramout since October 2015, while media worker Ahmad Maher has been kidnapped by the security belt forces, which are affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council (STC).

The trial of journalist Sultan Qattaran is ongoing, and while he was released by the Criminal Court linked to the Houthi militia with the condition that he

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remain in Sana'a and attend trial sessions, the proceedings have been called into question due to concerns regarding their impartiality. Notably, four of the journalists being held by the Houthi militia are facing death sentences, namely Akram Al-Walidi, Tawfiq Al-Mansouri, Harith Hameed, and Abdul Khaliq Imran. The Women Journalists Without Chains has condemned these judgments as illegitimate and demands their immediate release, along with the release of all other captive journalists.

Nabil Al-Sadaawi, a journalist and engineer who worked for the official Saba News Agency, was abducted by the Houthis on September 21, 2015. His whereabouts remained unknown to his family until July 2019, when he was accused of spying for the Saudi-led coalition and given an eight-year prison sentence.

Journalist Tawfiq Al-Mansouri and two of his colleagues, Abdul Khaliq Imran and Harith Hameed, were tortured by Abdulkader Al-Murtadha (Head of the Prisoners Committee linked with the Houthi militia) and his brother Abu Shihab in the Houthi militia's jails in August 2022. Even their fellow inmates

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in the communal cells were kept in the dark about their whereabouts as the torture and enforced disappearance persisted.

The group documented Ahmed Maher's physical and psychological assault on September 5, 2022. He had been abducted by the Southern Transitional Council militia, and under duress, he had been forced to record false admissions in a video recording. The Southern Transitional Council militia was held accountable for Maher's apparent signs of torture.

In light of these circumstances, Women Journalists Without Chains considers the treatment of Ahmed Maher by the Transitional Council militia to be a serious crime and a flagrant breach of all international laws and conventions, as well as the Yemeni constitution. According to the organization, those responsible for these crimes should be held accountable.

Moreover, Women Journalists Without Chains strongly condemns the deplorable treatment of kidnapped journalists in the prisons of both the

Houthis and the Transitional militia, as these practices are contrary to international conventions and covenants. The organization calls for the prompt release of Maher and all other journalists who have been abducted. It emphasizes that the attacks on kidnapped journalists constitute a crime against humanity, as well as a blatant violation of the Yemeni constitution and international law.

### ***Hadramout Trials***

Several journalists were harassed by the authorities of Hadramout Governorate. Recently, Abdullah Bakir and Hala Badawy were acquitted by a court after enduring harassment, enforced disappearance, and damage to their reputations. Other journalists, including Muhammad al-Yazidi, a former Belqis TV correspondent, and Sabri bin Makhashin, who is currently being tried in absentia, were also forced to flee by the Hadramout authorities. In January 2021, Hala Badawy was arrested and disappeared in the Military Intelligence prison of the second military region. She was subjected to torture and a defamation campaign on Mukalla Radio before being transferred for treatment to the central prison. She was released on bail in April the following



year, and her trial continued until she was found innocent in December. Similarly, journalist Abdullah Bakir, who worked in the media office of the Governor of Hadramout, was arrested in May 2020. He was hospitalized twice due to his worsening health, and his trial continued until he was acquitted in December 2022, coinciding with the month of Ramadan.

### ***Behavioral Code... More Limitations***

The Houthi militia has passed a "Behavioral Code" on November 7, 2022, which imposes additional restrictions on state employees in areas under their control. The fourth chapter of the code includes specific provisions for regulating media and social media, which curtail freedom of the press and journalism.

As an example, the "Behavioral Code" contains paragraphs that restrict government employees from providing information, documents, comments, or statements to the media or social media if it relates to public service units and violates the state's guidance and interests. This goes against the constitutional right to access information. Additionally, the code prohibits

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employees from issuing or publishing any data, speeches, or materials that contradict the teachings and values of Islam or oppose the state's public policy. The state mentioned in this text refers to the Houthi militia's political authority, which obtained power through force. The code prohibits employees from expressing their opinions or opposition and equates the sanctity of Islamic values with the state's public policy.

The organization cautions against the implementation of any laws or regulations that could impede freedom of expression and opinion, impose further limitations on press freedom, or create barriers to journalistic and media operations in this situation. According to the WJWC, the Houthi militia's code of conduct for civil service personnel violates the Yemeni Republic's constitution, runs counter to the Civil Service Law, and contravenes international conventions and treaties.

### ***Suspension of Journalists' Salaries***

The WJWC has stated that journalists are currently facing challenging economic and living situations as a result of arbitrary measures taken against

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them. Among these measures, the Houthis have decreased their salaries and compelled them and other government staff to perform Corvée work. Furthermore, the internationally recognized government has failed to fulfill its legal and ethical duties by withholding the salaries of employees in official institutions located beyond its jurisdiction.

The organization has expressed its resolute support for journalists and has urged the internationally recognized government to honor its obligations by ensuring that all official media employees receive their salaries, without exception.

Women Journalists Without Chains has highlighted that the majority of workers in the Ministry of Information, Saba News Agency, radio, television, and state-owned newspapers, numbering in the thousands, have either been terminated from their positions or coerced to work under the editorial guidelines enforced by the Houthi militia without compensation. This arrangement is akin to a form of forced labor, similar to Corvée, where they

must work in exchange for aid provided by international humanitarian organizations.

### ***Media Institutions Forced to Close***

Amidst the ongoing war and the absence of public freedoms, some media workers have established local radio stations that refrain from expressing any political views. However, in 2017, the Houthis imposed an unlawful regulation that necessitates these organizations to obtain permits from the Ministry of Information and pay fees for these permits, in addition to interfering with their programming schedules.

In January of last year, the Houthis closed six local radio stations on the pretext of not possessing a license from the Ministry of Information. The Union of Journalists reported that the radio stations that were shut down by the Houthis are "Sout Al-Yemen," "Grand FM," "Al-Awla," "Community Childhood," "Al-Diwan," and "Delta." "Sout Al-Yemen" radio station shared videos of the raid it experienced, showing images of soldiers meddling with equipment and others attempting to conceal surveillance cameras.

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Subsequently, Sout Al-Yemen radio station received two court decisions compelling the Ministry of Information to hand over the stolen property and give the required licenses, allowing it to resume operations. Unfortunately, as of the time this report was written, the radio station was still closed. The other local radio stations listed pledged to airing the Houthi-mandated public mobilization and audience-directing programs after obtaining the necessary permissions and paying the illegal costs.

### ***Rise of Social Media & New Media Celebrities in Conflict Zones***

Amidst the turmoil of the recent years, a new crop of influencers has risen to prominence through unconventional media channels and social networking platforms. Some of these figures operate from foreign locations, while others reside in territories controlled by warring factions. While these voices may not adhere to traditional journalistic standards and often lack maturity in their messaging, they nevertheless exercise their legal right to freedom of expression and opinion.

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Non-traditional media activists operating in conflict zones face a range of targeting tactics employed by the Houthi militia. These tactics include imprisonment, exposure to sectarian lectures, incitement via media channels, and threats of false accusations and trials, all aimed at either coercing or silencing them.

### ***Disturbing Press Freedom Indicators in Yemen:***

- Journalist are frequently targeted by terrorist bombings.
- Press freedom is continuously being restricted.
- All conflicting parties show hostility towards press freedom and journalists.
- Abducted journalists are subjected to inhumane treatment, including physical and psychological torture by the Houthi and the STC militias.
- Deterioration of living and economic conditions for journalists and media workers due to halted salary payments and reduced job opportunities.

### ***Recommendations:***

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- Immediately release journalists and media professionals who have been arbitrarily detained.
- Stop harassing journalists and refrain from hindering them while performing their professional duties.
- Provide necessary protection to journalists and media professionals to carry out their professional duties.
- Investigate all cases of violations against journalists and press freedom.
- Punish entities and individuals who have committed violations against journalists.
- Protect journalists covering armed conflicts from all forms of targeting and attacks.
- Do not politicize the judiciary and use it as a tool to prosecute journalists.
- Stop all unjust judgments against journalists related to their professional activities.
- Respect international covenants and treaties related to protecting freedom of expression and opinion.
- Release salaries of all media professionals and improve their living conditions.

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- Call on the international community, particularly the United Nations and the International Federation of Journalists, to make clear and tangible efforts to pressure all parties to release abducted journalists and to show solidarity with press freedom and provide support to media institutions.
- Demand media institutions to provide safety tools for their field correspondents and train their workers in occupational safety.