



The Violent Tactics Used by the Houthi Militia to Suppress Press Freedom

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Overview of the State of Press Freedom in the Era of the Houthi militia

1- In the context of armed conflicts and impunity, journalists and media professionals in Yemen continue to be at risk due to the ongoing fighting. Journalists are subjected to violations such as killing, arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, physical attacks, trumped-up charges and unjustified restrictions imposed on their rights, especially their right to freedom of expression.

2- Maat's estimates indicate that the Houthi militia committed more than 920 press freedom violations since its control over the capital in 2015 until April 2022. However, it committed nearly 53 violations from May 2021 until April 2022. Yemen ranks 169th in the World Press Freedom Index for 2021 out of 180 countries issued by Reporters Without Borders.

3- The Houthi militia imposed almost complete control over the Yemeni press and spread fear and self-censorship in the journalistic environment. Any journalist who talks about the Houthi militia and the violations it perpetrates becomes murdered, kidnapped, detained, threatened, incited against, and chased by the militia's followers, or prevented from carrying out his work by confiscating the newspapers in which he works or preventing him from covering the events. As a result, Yemen has become one of the worst places worldwide for press freedoms.

4- On the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day, which falls on May 3 of each year, Maat sheds light on the violation of press freedoms in Yemen by the Houthi militia. The safety of journalists and media workers is threatened. So, the paper documents facts about the violations committed by the Houthi militia toward press freedoms from May 2021 to the end of April 2022. To draw the international community's attention to protecting press freedoms and rights from the Houthi militia.

The Houthi group committed more than **920 violations** of press freedom from their control of the capital, Sanaa, in 2015 until April 2022, but it committed nearly **53 violations** between May 2021 and April 2022.

Assassination is the Fate of All Journalists who Criticize the Houthi militia

- 5- Houthi prevented Journalists talk about the Houthi militia or human rights abuses, or their lives may be in danger. Every journalist who raises a human rights issue related to the Houthi group is considered an enemy to them, and his penalty is assassination. Maat's human rights assessments and testimonies indicate the Houthi militia's involvement in the killing of 47 journalists and photographers from the beginning of the conflict until April 2022. Journalists were also targeted by a fire while carrying out their work documenting human rights violations issues in armed conflict.
- 6- On November 9, 2021, the Houthis placed a bomb in the journalist Mahmoud al-Atmi's car to assassinate him and his wife, journalist Rasha al-Harazi, because of their journalistic work. As a result, journalist Rasha Al-Harazi and her fetus were killed while going to the hospital for prenatal checkups. Shrapnel and fractures injured Al-Atami's body. Al-Atami was threatened many times by the Houthi militia, in conjunction with the impunity of the perpetrators. Maat asserts that such incidents force journalists to remain silent and exercise self-censorship for fear of assassination or physical liquidation.

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Houthi Militia Threatens to Silence the Voices of Dissident Journalists

- 7- The human rights testimonies obtained by Maat by journalists and media professionals indicate that they have received continuous threats of death and kidnapping by the Houthis, which forced some of them to stop their journalistic work
- 8- In December 2021, journalist Ali Muhammad Al-Uqabi, editor of Al-Thawra Net, was threatened with death and physical liquidation by one of the supervisors of the Houthi militia in Al-Mahwit Governorate because of his human rights views against the militia.
- 9- In April 2022, the journalist "Wiam Al-Sufi"; the September 26 newspaper correspondent, was threatened with kidnapping by armed outlaws related to the Houthi militia in Taiz governorate. Her husband and brother were subjected to incitement by the militia to force her to quit her journalistic work.

Journalists are subjected to constant threats of death by the Houthi group, which sometimes forces them to leave their journalistic work.

Journalists Imprisoned by the Houthis

10- The Houthi militia is still arbitrarily detaining about nine journalists: Waheed Al-Sufi, Abdul-Khaleq Omran, Tawfiq Al-Mansoori, Ikram Al-Walidy, Harith Hamid, Nabil Al-Sadawi, Muhammad Abdul-Salahi, Waleed Al-Matari, and Muhammad Ali Junaid; four of them were sentenced to death, some of these detained journalists suffer from health problems, do not receive adequate medical care, and are subjected to torture. Despite the international demands of the Houthi militia for their release, all these appeals are in vain..

11- In March 2022, testimonies issued by the families of the journalists Abdul-Khaleq Omran, Tawfiq Al-Mansoori, and Harith Hamid revealed that Houthi tortured them inside the prisons. Houthi beat them with iron sticks and electric wires in sensitive zones on their bodies and deprived them of services, especially medical services. And that the Houthi militia deposited them in Solitary cells.

12- In July 2021, journalist Fahd Al-Arhabi was arrested in Amran governorate for posting pictures and videos on Facebook documenting militia forces storming a wedding hall, arresting the groom and artists, confiscating musical instruments, and assaulting guests on the pretext of banning songs at weddings.

13- In August 2021, the Houthi militia worked to hide journalist Younis Abdel Salam before it later admitted its responsibility for the disappearance. In March 2022, a human rights assessment revealed that the Houthi group had hidden the journalist Nadia Moqbel and prevented her from contacting her family.

The Houthi militia continues to arbitrarily detain about 9 journalists in their prisons.

Breaking into and closing media headquarters and preventing journalists and media professionals from doing their work

- 14- Since the Houthi militia took control of the capital, Sanaa, all newspapers and websites opposed to it have been closed. They break into the various media sites, force them to stop working, loot their equipment and devices, and prevent the media from covering the events and doing their work.
- 15- In January 2022, a human rights testimonial confirmed that members of the Houthi militia stormed the headquarters of independent radio stations in Sana'a, which are Delta, Sawt al-Yaman, Diwan, Al-Oula, Qarand, and the Holy Qur'an. Then militia gunmen began to attack the media workers working in these stations before their equipment and devices were seized and forced to stop working, and the pretext for closing these sites was not to obtain their work permits.
- 16- In April 2022, the Houthi militia raided the media headquarters of three community radio stations in the governorates of Ibb and Dhamar: (Samarah FM, Alwan FM, and Yemen Music), then destroyed their equipment and stole it.

In September 2021, the militia prevented media photographer Abdul Rahman Al-Ghabri and his crew from filming in the old Sana'a and confiscated their cameras and private phones, despite obtaining a permit from the Culture Ministry of the Houthi militia.

The Houthi militia continues to close down media websites and newspapers and prevent media professionals from doing their work.

Conclusion and recommendations

Finally, Yemen is one of the worst environments for journalistic work. Because the Houthi militia used a large number of violent tactics to obliterate the freedom of the press, foremost of which is the assassination of opposition journalists, threatening them with violence, arresting and torturing them in prisons, closing their media headquarters, and preventing them from working. The only constant that the Yemeni press is the increasing danger. So, Maat recommends for peace, development, and human rights the following: -

- The UN experts on Yemen should continue to investigate violations committed against journalists, work to hold perpetrators accountable under international law, ensure the journalists' protection and enable them to carry out their work in Yemen.
- The Houthi militia must pressure to stop targeting press freedom by threatening and killing journalists and imprisoning them. They have to release nine journalists from their prisons and reverse the execution of the four unjustly sentenced journalists.
- All those arbitrarily detained must be released urgently to ensure the dignity, safety, and security of those released.
- Sanctions should be imposed on members of the Houthi militia who target freedom of the press and the adoption of serious investigations to uncover and punish the perpetrators of violations of journalists by the militia.
- Support must be provided to journalists who are victims, in addition to helping them document violations with impunity from the Houthi militia.

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