

MEDIA FREEDOM VIOLATIONS REPORT - YEMEN

JANUARY-FEBRUARY

2018

Escalation of Media Freedom Targeting in Yemen



Executive Summar

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Introduction

The new year, 2018, is no better than previous years with respect to media freedom. In January and February, 2018, media freedoms in Yemen underwent unprecedented arbitrary and systematic practices. Media outlets and journalists were targeted in areas controlled by the legitimate government in an attempt to silence the media

Al-Houthi militia continues to be the avowed enemy of journalists in Yemen, by practicing large-scale intimidation and abuse of media freedom. It still refuses to release the three kidnapped journalists who have spent more than 3 years in its prisons

In a similar vein, recent developments in Aden and southern regions in general are considered a serious threat to media freedom. Authorities in those parts of the country are no different from the Houthi militia when it comes to media freedom. Criminal Investigation in Aden, for example, has summoned journalist Fathi ibn Lazraq on account of his writings. Another journalist, Kashmim, was also kidnapped by the local authorities police apparatus in Hadhramout

In the past two months, incidents of targeting journalists in the dominions of the legitimate government have increased. The Supreme Security Committee (SSC) in Taiz has ordered the closure of Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel in Taiz and the prevention of its team from practicing their job under the pretext of seeking to incite discord in the ranks of the national front. Unidentified assailants fired an RPG projectile at the Bandar Aden Radio tower, while other unidentified gunmen targeted and looted headquarters of Aden 24 and al-Yawm Al-Thamin newspapers

Documenting such practices and violations, the SEMC-affiliated Media Freedom Observatory in Yemen monitored (18) violation cases in various parts of the country, including two killings by the Houthi militia in Taiz, and one killing in a Saudi-led Coalition airstrike in Hodeida Governorate

While international laws on the protection of journalists are no longer sufficient for protecting journalists from violations perpetrated by the conflicting parties in Yemen, media outlets must provide safety tools for journalists. Journalists, too, must protect themselves by adhering to the professional safety tools and dress such as the helmet, shield and first aid kit

Mostafa Nasr

Director, SEMC



Report Methodology

Data in this report were collected by a professional team of SEMC-affiliated observers, distributed in the five main governorates: Sana'a, Taiz, Aden and Hadramout

Observers relied on direct contact with the victims, victim relatives' testimonies, media releases, and reporting of violations to the Observatory. The team reviewed and verified all data and information monitored through a verification mechanism comprising at least 3 different sources

Data contained in this report do not suggest that all violations have been monitored. In fact, many cases are not reported due to fears of further consequences inflicted on the victims by the oppressors

This report does not cite all stories of violations for the sheer reason of keeping the report short. Only stories of the most important violation are covered in this report

:Definitions and keywords

Kidnappings: The term is used in this report to refer to all instances of 'arrest' perpetrated by groups and entities beyond the control of the internationally recognized legitimate authority

Executive Summary

The report monitors 18 violations of media freedom in Yemen during January and February, 2018. Victims varied, including individuals (journalists and social media .(activists), and media institutions (bombings and closures of media offices

The cases of violations documented by SEMC-affiliated Media Freedom Observatory were concentrated in Aden, Sana'a, Taiz, Hodeidah, Hadramout, and .al-Jouf

The report provides brief accounts of (18) violations of media freedom in Yemen, in which journalists and social media activists were targeted in January and February. Violations included 3 killings, 3 injury cases, 1 kidnapping, 4 assaults, threats and .interrogation, 1 house looting, 1 incitement, and 1 attempted assault

The report also documents 4 cases of violation targeting media institutions. The Supreme Security Committee in Taiz closed the office of Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel in the governorate and prevented al-Jazeera team from practicing their job on the pretext of inciting discord in the national front. The headquarters of the Aden 24 newspaper was also raided and looted. Unidentified gunmen targeted the headquarters of al-Yawm al-Thamin newspaper, showering it with bullets. An RPG .projectile was fired by unidentified assailants at the Bandar Aden Radio tower

Al-Houthi militia in Sana'a ordered local authorities and commercial banks to freeze the accounts of a number of journalists and media outlets, including late Arafat Mudabesh, Marwan Dammaj, SEMC director - Mustafa Nasr, and a number of Deputy Ministers of Information, in addition to Suhail Satellite Channel, Shabab FM .Radio and Al-Masdar newspaper

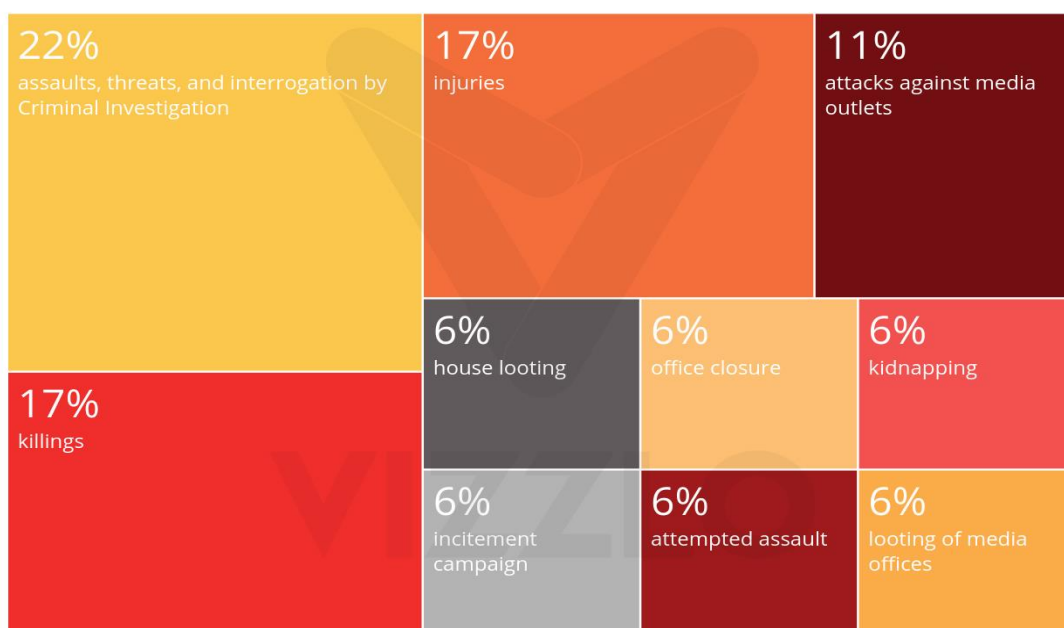
Types of Violations

The report monitors 18 violations of media freedom in January and February 2018. A total of 14 cases, 78% of total violations, targeted individuals (journalists and social media activists), whereas 4 cases, 22%, were directed against media institutions

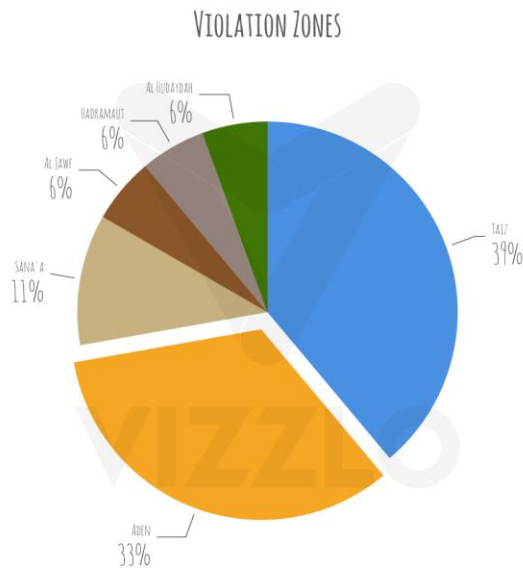
Violations targeting individuals include 3 killings, 3 injury cases, 1 kidnapping, 4 assaults, threats and interrogations, 1 house looting, 1 incitement, and 1 attempted assault

Other violations were perpetrated against media institutions. The Supreme Security Committee in Taiz ordered the closure of Al-Jazeera office in the governorate and prevented al-Jazeera team from practicing their job on the pretext of seeking to stir up discord in the national front. The headquarters of the Aden 24 newspaper was also raided and looted. Unidentified gunmen targeted the headquarters of al-Yawm al-Thamin newspaper, showering it with bullets. An RPG projectile was fired by unidentified assailants at Bandar Aden Radio tower

TYPES OF VIOLATIONS



Violation Zones



Violations took place in different parts of the country. They were distributed as follows: 7 cases in Taiz, 6 in Aden, 2 in Sana'a and 1 in each of Hadramout, Al Jawf and .Hodeida

Responsibility for Violations



The Houthi militia tops the list of perpetrators of abuses of press freedom, carrying out 7 violations. The legitimate government was responsible for 4 violations, whereas 1 violation was perpetrated by the Saudi-led Coalition. Moreover, 4 violations were carried out by unidentified assailants. The Criminal Investigation police controlled by the Transitional Council in Aden was responsible for a single case. A news website was involved in a violation incident by launching an incitement campaign ..against journalist Abdulaziz al-Majidi

Killings

There were 3 cases of killing during January and February, 2018; 2 in Taiz, .and 1 in Hodeida



Balquis Satellite Channel correspondent, Mohammed al-Qadasi, was killed on January 22, while heading towards the site of the massacre committed by the Houthi militia in its bombing of residential areas and the Khayami Camp in rural al-Ma'afer in Taiz .governorate



Cameraman Osama Sallam al-Maqtari was killed on January 27, while covering battles between Houthi forces and popular resistance-backed Yemeni government forces in Taiz eastern .front



On February 10, Al-Sahaat Satellite Channel correspondent, Abdullah Al-Montaser was killed in Hays, Hodeida in an Arab coalition airstrike while covering battles between Yemeni .government and Houthi forces

Injury Cases

Three cases of injury were recorded during January and February 2018. All three cases took place in Taiz



On January 22, journalist Bashir Aqlan was severely wound in his head while covering the Khayami massacre. As his health deteriorated, Prime Minister Ahmed Obeid Bin Dagher ordered transferring him abroad for treatment



On January 27, cameraman Azzam al-Zubairi was wounded by a mortar shrapnel while covering battles between Houthi militants and the Yemeni government forces in the vicinity of the Ceremonies Camp, to the east of Taiz



On January 28, cameraman Hudhayfa al-Athuri was wounded by a shrapnel of a projectile fired by Houthi militants, while covering battles to the east of Taiz. Al-Athuri lost some of his left foot functions as a shrapnel was lodged in his left leg, causing a total obstruction of the spinal nerve and a partial damage to the supine nerve above the knee

Other Cases



On February 21, Journalist Awad Kashmim was kidnapped by local security forces in the city of Mukalla. This incident came only a few days after Kashmim was dismissed by the Hadhramout governor from his post as chairman of Bakthir Press and Publishing House, as Kashmim criticized the situation in the governorate and the weak performance of the military campaign against al-Qaeda.



Criminal Investigation police in Aden summoned the editor of Aden al-Ghad newspaper, Fathi Ben-Lazraq because of his newspaper articles. It may be noted that the criminal investigation police is not authorized to summon journalists, as the Press and Publications Prosecution is exclusively responsible for summoning and trying journalists. Lazraq also revealed that one of the leaders of the Transitional Council in Aden was planning to murder him.



The Houthi militia in Sana'a distributed a circular to local authorities and commercial banks to freeze the accounts of a number of journalists and media institutions. Journalists included late Arafat Mudabesh, Marwan Dammaj, SEMC director - Mustafa Nasr, and a number of Deputy Ministers of Information. Media outlets included Suhail Satellite Channel, Shabab FM Radio and Al-Masdar newspaper.

Violations Targeting Media Institutions

An SSC issued an order of closure of Al-Jazeera office in Taiz. The order stated that al-Jazeera team shall be prevented from practicing their job on the pretext of inciting discord .in the ranks of the national front

The headquarters of Aden 24 newspaper was also attacked, and looted by unidentified armed assailants. Contents of the building were either damaged or looted, and the security guard were attacked. The incident took place as clashes broke out between forces .of the so-called Transitional Council and the government forces in Aden in late January

A video recorded by the newspaper's surveillance camera showed a number of gunmen .storming the building and damaging its contents

In a similar vein, unidentified gunmen assaulted the headquarters of al-Yawm al-Thamin newspaper on February 17. The assailants showered the building with a barrage of bullets, .causing damage of offices and equipment

On February 28, the Bandar Aden Radio Tower was targeted by an RPG missile fired by unidentified assailants. This incident comes in the context of the ongoing attempts to terrorize and restrict media freedoms. Such attacks on journalists and media outlets are .carried out on an almost daily basis