

# Report

## Media in Yemen Working in a Hostile Environment



### Annual Report



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# Violations Cases Against Media in Yemen

During 2019

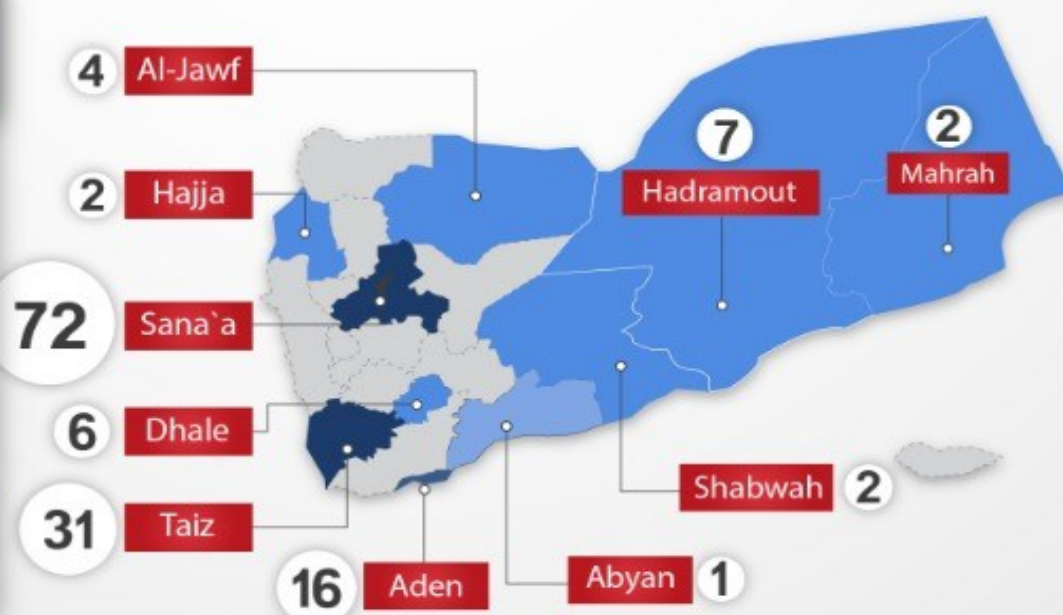
## 143 Violations Cases

11 Against media organizations

132 Against Individuals



### Violations Areas



## Media in Yemen, 2019: Working in a Hostile Environment



## Media in Yemen, 2019: Working in a Hostile Environment

The second phrase of the title, “Working in a Hostile Environment,” is carefully selected as it precisely reflects the state of journalism in Yemen and current suffering of Yemeni journalists.

Journalism in Yemen has become a precarious and risky profession, and journalists in Yemen are vulnerable to all types of abuses, including murder, detention, torture, enforced disappearance, threats and penetration. This state of affairs is further worsened by the state of polarization of the media by parties to the conflict in Yemen and the emergence of TV channels, newspapers and news websites funded by the various conflict parties both inside Yemen and abroad.

Inside Yemen, the margin of media freedom has significantly narrowed. Results of monitoring show a dark picture of violations. In addition, constituents of media freedom have been noticeably destroyed. The state of hostility to the media has become deeply rooted in and a characteristic of the media scene in Yemen at its worst stage. In order to delve more deeply into describing the media scene in Yemen to identify its prominent features, we apply a method of description that takes into account variations in the state of the media from one part of the country to another according to the nature of the dominant political and military power as detailed in the following sections.

### Houthi-Controlled Areas, (Ansarullah)

Monitoring results documenting the violations committed in Houthi-controlled areas reflect the persistent hostility towards independent and opposition media that does not conform to the line of Houthi-approved views and orientations. The report documents (75) violations of media freedom in those areas. This number reflects the size of risks facing media professionals in those areas. A deeper look shows the features of the media that characterize these regions, which can be summarized as follows:



## Houthi-Controlled Areas, (Ansarullah)

- ♦ The media in the Houthi-controlled areas can be properly designated as a 'one-voice media,' for independent and partisan media are absent from the media scene. Dozens of newspapers, websites and TV channels have either ceased to exist or their headquarters have been moved to other areas. Examples of such TV channels and newspapers are the Yemen Satellite Channel, Balqees Satellite Channel, Yemen Shabab, Suhail and Yemen Today channels, in addition to *al-Thawri*, *al-Sahwa*, *Yemen Today*, *al-Masdar Online*, *Al-Shari' Akhbar Al-Yum*, and *26<sup>th</sup> September*. News websites include, for example, *Al-Thawri Net*, *Al-Ishtiraki Net*, *News Yemen*, *Yemen Press*, *Yemen Monitor*, *Wakalat Khabar (Khabar Agency)*, *Marib Press*, *Al-Wahdawi Net* and *Yemen Times*.
- ♦ Several newspapers, radios and other media that conform to the political Houthi line were established in Sana'a. Such newly established media include *New Yemen* weekly newspaper issued by the Houthi moral guidance, and the *Asala FM* radio, *al-Oula* radio and the *al-Ittihad* magazine.
- ♦ Repressive measures such as intimidation, kidnappings, and threats are reflected in the journalistic production of dozens of journalists, who feel they are closely watched. Many of these journalists stopped writing altogether for fear of oppression and abuse.
- ♦ Hundreds of Yemeni journalists have moved from Houthi-controlled to other less dangerous areas, both inside Yemen and abroad. Many of the journalists who left Houthi dominions did so for fear of persecution and repression, but some of them had to leave because they lost their jobs as the institution where they worked stopped functioning.
- ♦ Continuing to control official media in Sana'a, forcing an approved line of normative discourse that serves the military and political orientations of the Houthis, appointing many of the group's close associates in key positions, and empowering them to control and run these media institutions in a manner that serves the group's agendas.
- ♦ Issuing decisions prohibiting filming by any local or foreign media in Houthi-controlled areas without obtaining a prior official permission. Such permissions are usually not easy to obtain.

- ♦ Restricting the activity of civil society organizations working in the media field. As a result, many civil society organizations moved their headquarters to areas outside of the Houthi control, while some of those organizations were forced to close their offices due to persistent interference in the work of civil society organizations by the Houthi group and its subsidiary bodies.
- ♦ The ability of journalists to reach areas where the humanitarian crisis, famines and epidemics are widespread is greatly diminished. Consequently, the military aspect dominates the humanitarian aspect.
- ♦ The low number of cases of abuses of journalists and media personnel in some Yemeni regions does not mean in any way improvement of the press freedom index in those regions. Rather, it certainly reflects the lack of media environment and the absence of journalistic activity. It also means that violations reach a record level when observers are unable to monitor the media scene, and worse still, when even victims of violations are unable to report for fear of further abuse.

## Areas Controlled by the Internationally Recognized Yemeni Government

The media scene in the internationally recognized Yemeni government areas of control is characterized by a kind of ambiguity and lack of clarity of vision. Whereas violations get more intense in some governorates, they decrease in others. The decisive factor in dealing with the media is the nature of the military and political forces controlling those areas, as government-controlled areas can hardly be viewed as one bloc. Therefore, the media were subject to escalating abuse in 2019, amounting to 62 violations perpetrated by a number of parties in the dominions of the Yemeni government, including cases in which the government and its affiliated parties were involved. The government and its affiliates were responsible for some of those violations, whereas unidentified perpetrators or influential persons were responsible for some others.

- ♦ Although the areas under government control, especially Aden, Taiz and Marib, have constituted a haven for hundreds of journalists who fled Sana'a for fear of persecution, these areas are also characterized by an environment that is far from friendly to opposition and independent media depending on the orientation of influential actors. The media scene in government-controlled areas is characterized by the following:
- ♦ The media in the government-controlled areas is characterized by the prevalence of one voice, as the presence of the opposition media in those areas has diminished, and almost every governorate embraces the media that serves their orientations.
- ♦ From the first moment of eruption of armed conflict between the Yemeni government in Aden and the forces affiliated to the Southern Transitional Council (STC) calling for the secession of southern Yemen, violations of media freedom have escalated. Some journalists have been forced to leave the city, moving to other governorates or abroad.
- ♦ The Yemeni government still denies foreign journalists entry into the country to cover events and write firsthand field reports on conditions inside Yemen.
- ♦ The phenomenon of media funded by foreign countries, parties and groups has remarkably grown. Several websites, channels, newspapers and radio stations funded by local and regional actors have emerged, further contributing to the state of media polarization that serves the interests of the various parties to the conflict and employing the media for purposes of propaganda to serve the military and political goals of those sponsoring those media outlets.
- ♦ Some media outlets are prevented from operating in Yemen. A few examples are closure of Balqees Channel, Lana radio station, and *Akhbar Al-Yum* newspaper offices/headquarters in Aden. Distribution of a *l-Shari*' newspaper in Taiz is also restricted. Since early January 2018, Aljazeera Channel offices in Yemen have been closed on the backdrop of the crisis that erupted between Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the one hand and Qatar on the other.



The year 2019 witnessed launching of many websites, satellite channels and radio stations. These include Al-Mahra Satellite Channel along with its online website, Al-Mahra Post website, Al-Mahriya channel, al-Mustaqbal (future) radio, Al-Mukalla channel in Hadramout governorate, Ittihadiya radio, Aden Ether radio, Saada FM broadcast, the Crater Sky website, Yemen Story website, and al-Mokha News, Al-Anba' Online, Al-Muntaha Net, Al-Mada Press and Tamar Online website. *Akhbar Al-Yum* newspaper is resumed in Marib after its headquarters in Aden was stormed and looted. The paper edition of *Al-Shari'* newspaper was resumed in Aden.

## Yemeni Media Abroad

The war in Yemen that has been raging since 2015 led to the emergence of a new phenomenon of Yemeni media. Yemeni media abroad is mainly based in Cairo, Riyadh, and Istanbul, and to a lesser extent in some other countries. These countries host the most prominent Yemeni satellite channels and some websites.

The following are the main features of Yemeni media abroad:

- ♦ They rely directly on external funds, from countries, parties, or groups. Therefore, survival of those media outlets depends on their financier's capacity to continue supporting them. Therefore, those media lack independence and self-sustainability.
- ♦ Some of those channels and websites have proven capable of competing with in-country-based media and attracting increasing numbers of viewers and followers.

# Freedoms Media Yemen



## Report Methodology

Data in this report were collected by a professional team of SEMC-affiliated observers, distributed in the five main governorates. 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.

## Executive summary

The Report documents (143) cases of violations against individuals (journalists and social media activists), and media organizations (storming and burning of media institutions).

Cases of violations documented by the Yemeni Media Freedom Observatory (YMFO) were concentrated in Sana'a, Taiz, Aden, Hadramout, Dhali', Hajjah, Abyan, Shabwa, al-Mahrah and al-Jawf.

Violations monitored by YMFO in 2019 were attempted against individuals (journalists and social media activists), including 2 murders, 9 casualties, 6 kidnappings, 15 arrests, 30 assaults, 20 threats and a single case of suspension from work. The other 49 cases fall into several categories.

The report also monitored (11) cases of violations targeting media institutions. These include 4 cases of looting of media property, one case of storming the headquarters of the Yemeni News Agency, Saba, in Aden. There were also 4 cases of assaults on media institutions; namely, the Radio and Television Building, the 14th October newspaper, and the Al-Shari' newspaper offices. The other two cases involve firing at the office of Aden Al-Ghad newspaper, and plagiarizing the brand name of the Here's Aden media establishment.

## Types of Violations

The report documents (143) violations, 132 cases targeted individuals (journalists and social media activists), representing 93% of the total number of violations, and 11 cases of targeting media institutions, representing 7% of the total.

Cases varied to include 2 murders, 9 casualties, 6 kidnappings, 15 arrests, 30 assaults, 20 threats, 1 suspension from work, and 49 cases distributed among several categories.

The report also documents 11 cases of violations targeting media institutions, ranging from cases of looting, to assaults and storming.

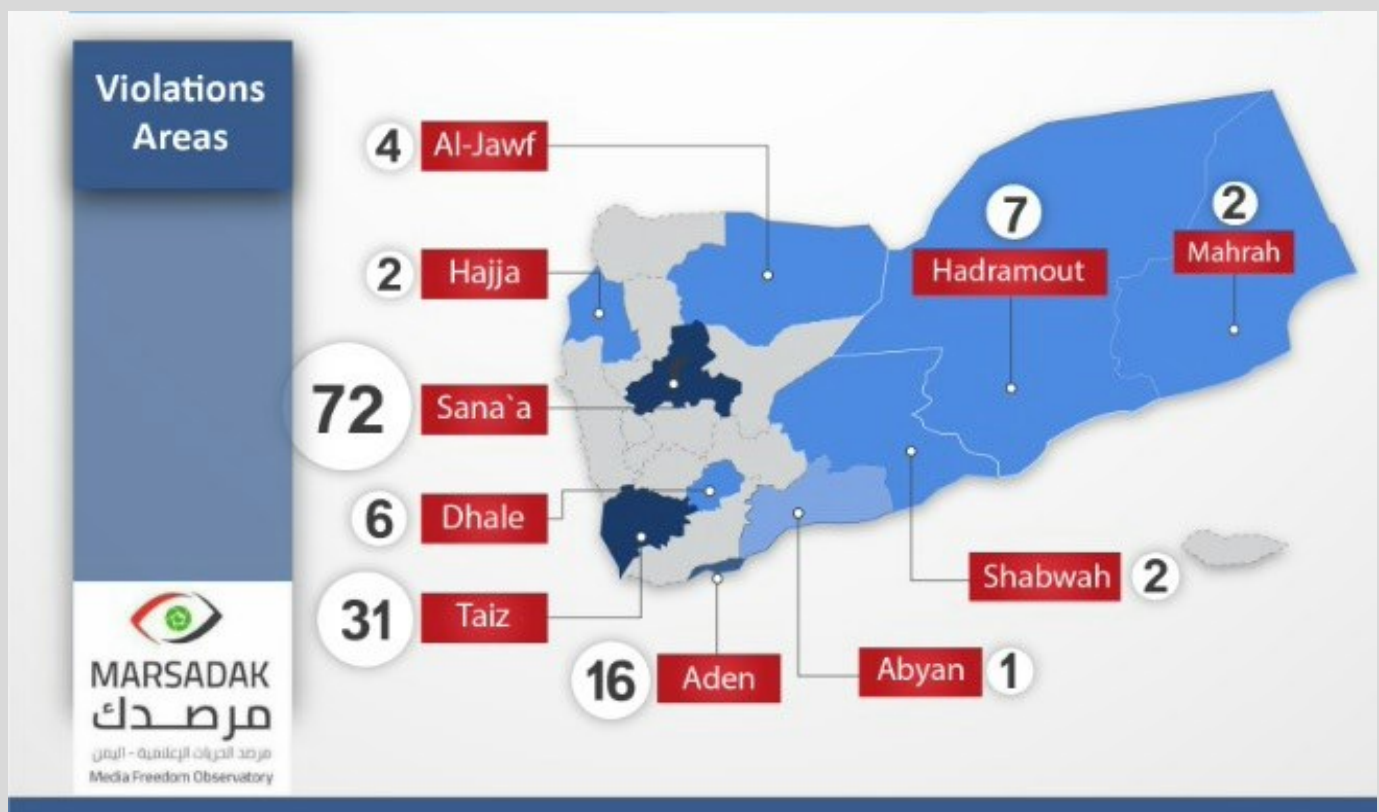




## Geographical Distribution of Violations

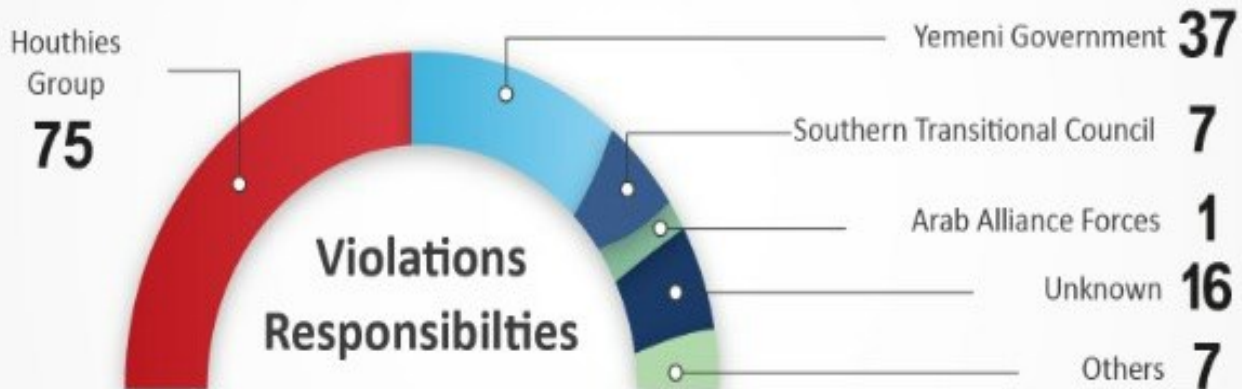
Various parts of the country were locales of abuses and violations of media freedom. The report monitors 72 violations in the capital, Sana'a, 31 in Taiz, and 16 cases in Aden.

Hadramout governorate comes next in number of number of violations with 7 cases, folloed by Dali' (6), Al-Jawf (4), the governorate of Hajjah, Shabwa and Al-Mahra with (2) cases each, and finally Abyan governorate (1 case).



## Responsibility for Violations

The Houthi group (Ansarullah) continues to top the list of perpetrators of violations targeting journalists in Yemen, being responsible for 75 violations of the total number of documented cases. Affiliates of the internationally recognized Yemeni government are involved in 37 cases, whereas unidentified perpetrators were involved in 16 cases. STC militants were responsible for 7 cases of violation, and the Saudi-led Arab coalition forces were responsible for a single case of violation. The remaining 7 cases were perpetrated by other parties.



## Murders



In January 2019, YMFO documented the murder of Ziad Al Sharabi, who was killed by unidentified persons on January 28. Another case of murder involved the killing of a technician working for the Abu Dhabi Channel. The technician was killed in a vehicle-borne bomb explosion in a crowded marketplace in Mocha town, Taiz Governorate, and two of his colleagues were wounded in the same incident.



Ghalib Labhash, a cameraman, was killed on May 5, 2019 by a Houthi sniper, while covering battles between the Yemeni army and the Houthi forces in Al-Yari, Dhali' governorate. Labhash worked as a lensman for a number of local and foreign media.

# Casualties



Nine journalists were injured while performing their work. Abu Dhabi Channel correspondent, Faisal al-Thabhani, and his colleague Mohammed al-Shamiri, were wounded in a vehicle-borne bomb explosion in a marketplace in Mocha town, Taiz governorate.

On January 9, Mohammed al-Naqib and Nabil al-Junaid were seriously wounded in a Houthi drone blowup at al-Anad base in Dhali' governorate.

Editor of the Fourth Dimension news website, Majid al-Shuaibi, was injured in a Houthi sniper's fire while covering battles in Qa'taba, Dhali' governorate.

On 30 May, Ahmad al-Basha, a journalist, was slightly injured in a blast while covering events in the northern front in Taiz.

On September 10, Balqees satellite TV reporter, Mohammed Youssef, survived a rocket attack by Houthi militants in Meedi, Hajja governorate. Youssef was injured in the attack and hospitalized.

On September 11, Saleh al-Ghanimi, who works as a photographer for a number of media outlets, was injured by shrapnel which resulted in fractures in his right shoulder. The incident resulted from Houthi militants' firing of an artillery shell on Hiran area north of Hajjah governorate, while the photographer was covering battles between government and Houthi forces in the area.

On December 30, Suhail satellite channel correspondent, Nasr Al-Masa'di, was injured by shrapnel from a shell fired by Houthi militants while covering the battles between the Yemeni government and Houthi forces in Murais, Dhal' governorate.

# Kidnappings

Fuad Sharha, a journalist, was kidnapped by Houthi gunmen in northern 60th St. in Sana'a. The journalist was stopped by Houthi gunmen in Amran Roundabout. He was forced to get into their vehicle, and taken to an unknown location.

In August, Ihab al-Shawafi, a cameraman, was kidnapped by Houthi gunmen at a security checkpoint in al-Hawban. He was taken to an unknown location, and was released three months later.

Editor of Mareb Today website, Iyad Saleh Naji, was kidnapped by STC gunmen who broke into his apartment and detained him for four days in an STC prison where he was subjected to torture.

On July 27, masked informally dressed gunmen belonging to the Houthi Preventive Security apparatus, in 3 vehicles besieged the neighborhood where Abdulhafez al-Samadi, a journalist, lives. Al-Samadi was taken to an unknown location. Three days later, the kidnapped journalist's brother, Mua'th al-Samadi, received a call from an unidentified number. A person with a shaking scared voice hastily said, "Mu'ath! Give them the laptop. If you don't, they will arrest all of yAs Mua'th asked about the location of the kidnapped journalist and tried to inquire about his health, Abdulhafez's voice was immediately interrupted and someone else stated, "Don't worry! He's OK." The call was over. ou."



# Arrests



On September 18, 2019, Taha Saleh, a cameraman, and his assistant, Mohammed Hail, were kidnapped by a military patrol of a security checkpoint in Al-Jahmaliya, Taiz governorate, while documenting a story of a family whose house was destroyed in the war. Both journalists were detained in a building next to Mohammed Ali Othman School. Their camera and mobile phones were confiscated and they were prevented from contacting their families. He was released after five hours of detention.

In the morning of Feb. 18, Yemen Shabab Channel correspondent, Mu'taz Al-Naqeeb and the Balqees Satellite Channel correspondent, Muhammad Al-Yazidi, were arrested by the Court Complex guard in Mukalla while requesting permission to film the judges' protest in the complex. Their cellphones and cameras were confiscated and they were moved to the Military Intelligence headquarters in the city before being released.

## Arrests

Correspondent of Al-Wahdawi Net in Taiz, Jamil Al-Samit, was arrested by soldiers affiliated to the 6th Sector of the 22 Mecha Brigade. The journalist who was in poor health, was arrested on the backdrop of publishing articles criticizing corruption and the state of imbalance and corruption in the country's military and civil institutions. He was released six days later. Similarly, Military intelligence agents in Taiz stormed a hotel in the city, arrested three journalists: Munir Talal, Yahya al-Bu'aithi and Mahfouz al-Bu'aithi, and confiscated their cellphones and electronic devices. The journalists were detained for three days.

Al-Ghad Al-Mushreq TV channel correspondent, Jamal Sheneiter and Saleh Musawa, a cameraman, were detained at a security checkpoint controlled by Yemeni government forces in Shabwa governorate.

## Assaults

On 25 January, Nabil al-Quaiti, a lensman, was assaulted and arrested by Aden Security policemen in the Khor Maksar area while broadcasting a live FB video on his mobile phone in front of the Aden Hotel. He was transferred to the Security Department where he was detained for a few hours and his camera, cellphones and ID cards were confiscated.



Saleh al-Obeidi, a cameraman, was assaulted by soldiers with links to Yemeni government Riot Squads on the backdrop of his FB page posts.



On May 16, Abdullah Sabri's house was targeted in a Saudi-led coalition airstrike, leaving his mother and two of his sons dead, while he, his father and another son of his were injured.



Abdullah Kalshat, a journalist, was attacked and intimidated by armed men with links to an influential sheikh in al-Mahra governorate while carrying out his duty of covering an activity in Ghaida.

In April, 10 journalists, who have been detained for nearly 5 years in Political Security prison in Sana'a, suffered beating and torture individually and collectively, placed in solitary confinement, and denied visits by relatives during the said period. They were threatened with torture if they reveal any information of treatment of interns in Houthi prisons.

After four years of undergoing forced disappearances, the 10 journalists were referred by Houthi authorities to the Specialized Criminal Court, where they were tried on charges of collaboration with foreign countries.

## Threats

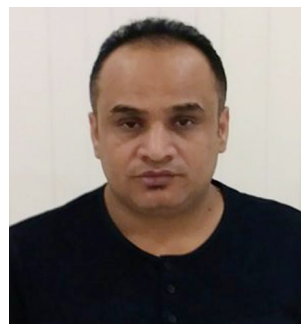
During the reporting period, a total of 20 threats were received by Yemeni journalists, including 10 in Taiz, 3 cases in Hadramout, 2 cases in Shabwa, and a single case in Mahra.

Al-Arabi al-Jadeed website reporter in Taiz, Wajdi al-Salimi received a call from a Criminal Investigation officer ordering him to report at the office for the purpose of interrogation on charges of abusing the army; failing that, he would be fetched by force. Al-Salimi, Jamal al-Asmar and Marzouq al-Jabri had been detained for two hours at the 145th military camp, commanded by Aden-based government vassals against the backdrop of documenting a humanitarian case in the governorate.



Editor of Al-Mushahid Net, Mohamed Amin, was intimidated by and received threats from several soldiers in Taiz.

Armed soldiers on a patrol vehicle intimidated his family. They made several parades in front of his residence, displaying their weapons. They frequented the place more than once, spending more than half an hour in front of his residence each time before leaving the place without explaining the reasons for such practices.



Journalists Ibtihal Al-Salihi, director of Yemen Today channel - Faisal Al-Shabibi, and Nour Suraib received threats of physical liquidation from unidentified persons on the backdrop of their press articles and social media posts.



# Violations Targeting Media Institutions



Media institutions were targeted in eleven violations documented by YMFO in 2019. These violations took place in 3 governorates; namely Sana'a, Aden and Taiz.

On July 4, Southern Transitional Council (STC) supporters stormed the building of the Yemeni News Agency (Saba) in Aden, prevented journalists from doing their work, attacked some of them, and threatened to punish those who would come to office again. Assailants destroyed and removed the agency metal plaque, and wrote graffiti warnings that the building should not be opened again.

On Aug. 18, STC gunmen prevented a number of journalists from working at the 14th October newspaper and the radio and television headquarters which were taken over by the STC. Only select journalists were retained and allowed to run the newspaper, and the radio and television services.

Unidentified gunmen riding a motorcycle fired live ammunition at the Aden Al-Ghad newspaper headquarters in Mansoura district, Aden. Assailants fled. No casualties were recorded.

Houthi authorities issued a circular requesting the Ministry of Justice in Sana'a to restrict property rights of natural and legal persons, referred to as 'traitors', including Suhail channel, Yemen Shabab channel, Shabab FM radio station, and Al-Masdar newspaper, in addition to 21 Yemeni journalists, in an initial step to seize property of blacklisted persons.

A security checkpoint in Taiz confiscated Al-Shari' newspaper distribution vehicle, prevented the distribution of the issue, and arrested the vehicle driver who was released a few days later.



## Yemeni Journalists Win International Awards



Despite the significant decline of Yemeni media in both quantity and quality, the year 2019 bore glad tidings represented by Yemeni journalists' winning of several local, Arab and regional awards. Such achievements reflect the resilience of Yemeni journalists in facing challenges and keep Yemeni journalism at a level that meets aspirations of the public.

Journalists who won awards or were honored for their journalistic distinction during the reporting period are as follows:

Producer Ahmed Baidar won an Emmy Award for the Hard News Feature Story category with PBS NewsHour. In addition, he was a candidate for the same award for his work with ABC News program: Nightline.

Aseel Sariya won the Areej Award for Multimedia Investigations, for his investigation entitled "corrupt relief under UN supervision". Sariya also won the European Union Award for the top 12 investigations worldwide, in the Shining Light Award at the 12th Global Investigative Journalism Conference in Germany.

Bashir Sinan, head of the Yemeni Association for Sports Media, competed for the award for the best newspaper article worldwide after being selected among the best (30) journalists in the press article category (Colored Piece). The 30 candidates were selected from among a list of (1700) journalists participating in the competition from the most famous news agencies worldwide. He is a candidate to the award for the best sports article in the competition.

Maad Al-Zakri won the Michael Kelly Award from the prestigious Atlantic Media Foundation alongside with the Egyptian journalist, Maggie Michel and Egyptian photographer Nariman Ayman Al-Mufti during a ceremony held in Washington.

## Civil Activism in the Yemeni Media Scene





**Several civil society organizations working in the field of the media have been active in carrying out activities that serve media professionals in Yemen. Such activities varied between training and organizing conferences and workshops on issues related to the media.**

- ♦ Of those organizations working in this field is the Studies and Economic Media Center (SEMC). During the reporting period, SEMC trained more than 130 journalists in Yemen, monitored the media scene and violations of media freedom, and published results of monitoring in the form of monthly reports illustrated with infographics, in addition to conducting an open discussion session on the World Impunity Day.

SEMC also sought to build the capacities of a number of journalists in 15 Yemeni governorates, introducing them to the importance of dealing with humanitarian stories and issues. Prizes were assigned to the best humanitarian stories. ‘Journalists for Population and Development Network,’ which is the first of a type in Yemen, was launched.

SEMC organized the International Forum on the Advancement of Humanitarian Information in cooperation with the French Information Agency (CFI). More than 30 leaders and representatives of various Yemeni media participated in the forum on the margins of the Areej Conference for Investigative Journalism held in Amman in November 2019.

The Center also issued the Conflict-sensitive Journalism Guide,” which contains all needs of journalists working in conflict zones.



- ♦ For its part, the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate sought to rehabilitate more than 70 journalists during the reporting period, focusing on occupational safety while covering events in conflict zones. Activities were carried out in the governorates of Taiz, Aden and Hadramout.
- ♦ The National Organization of Yemeni Journalists trained more than 150 media professionals during the reporting period, in addition to providing them with basic knowledge and skills related to methods of digital security and mechanisms of storing and documenting information and data. The organization also trained a number of journalists on skills and basics of photography, professional photography. A workshop on conflict-sensitive journalism was also held and it aimed at training journalists to adopt peace parlance and mitigate media discourse inciting violence. Other training workshops included content monitoring and analysis in the media, and operational planning in media institutions.
- ♦ The Cultural Information Center implemented training workshops targeting more than 300 journalists in the governorates of Sana'a and Aden. Participants were introduced to digital information security and citizen journalism. Fifteen journalists were trained on monitoring and documentation. Another workshop introduced trainees to common mistakes in radio presentation. Twenty journalists were also introduced to methods of conducting television and radio interviews, and some others to the art of writing news stories. The Cultural Information Center trained more than 40 journalists on enhancing media performance skills, conflict-sensitive journalism, gender-sensitive writing, the art of writing news articles, and enhancing journalistic performance skills. The Organization also organized the consultative meeting of journalists.



- ♦ Media Village for Development and Information was also present. It trained a number of journalists on occupational safety, and conducted training workshops on media coverage of obstetric fistula and activating the role of the media in introducing this issue.
- ♦ The Humanitarian Press Foundation, founded in 2019, implemented a number of training workshops in the governorate of Aden targeting 200 journalists. Examples of those training programs are the workshops on “writing the humanitarian story” and “data journalism in humanitarian contexts”.
- ♦ The Yemeni Investigative Journalism Network, founded in 2019, implemented a number of training workshops in Sana'a and Taiz governorates on the basics of investigative journalism and enhancing the capacities of Yemeni media professionals in the field of investigative journalism.



## Media Freedom Observatory — Yemen

The Media Freedom Observatory Platform is a professional and independent monitoring and information platform that contains maps and information on press violations and freedom of expression throughout Yemen

[Www.Marsadak.org](http://www.Marsadak.org)