Joint Statement

Yemen: Human rights groups condemn internet blocking and censorship

We, the undersigned local and international human rights organisations, strongly condemn the ongoing internet blocking and censorship in Yemen. We call for immediate action to put an end to this alarming violation of digital freedom, the right to access information, and the right to protest. We remind authorities in Yemen that the right to freedom of expression and to peaceful assembly are guaranteed under Articles ١٩ and ٢١ of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Yemen has ratified.

On ٢٥ September,٢٠٢٣, the eve of the commemoration of the ٢٦ September Revolution,when Yemen became a republic, the Media Freedom Observatory in Yemen reported that YemenNet, the state-owned telecommunications company currently under the control of the Houthi forces, blocked communication platforms including Zoom, Google Meet, and Signal. These internet access restrictions were promptly followed by Houthi de facto forces carrying out an alarming wave of arrests of demonstrators, most of whom were peacefully gathered to commemorate the day.

The measures carried out by YemenNet in September, are the latest in a long history of internet shutdowns and censorship in Yemen, which has intensified since the start of the conflict in ٢٠١٥ between the Houthi forces and the Saudi-led coalition . Since ٢٠١٧, Yemen has been witnessing a series of internet disruptions and blockages of social media and messaging platforms, reportedly carried out by the de facto Houthi forces. In ٢٠١٩, Yemen witnessed the highest rate of internet shutdowns in the Middle East.

Ongoing 'cyber war'

Attacks on internet infrastructure, control over telecom facilities, internet shutdowns, and censorship have been used by the different parties to the conflict in Yemen since ٢٠١٥, constituting what can be described as a 'cyber war' and are a part of a conflict strategy to control telecommunication and information sector, which continues to impact the overall quality of internet services.

report- ١٢ Yemen experienced a total of ،٢٠٢٣ More recently, in the first quarter of ed internet shutdowns. These incidents affected several regions including Shabwah, Taiz, Aden, Hadramaut, Marib, and Abyan, lasting from a few hours to more than a week. The causes behind these shutdowns ranged from technical three more internet ،٢٠٢٣ problems and floods to unidentified causes. In June shutdowns were reported in Taiz and Hadramut, lasting from one to three days. These internet disruptions have been attributed to both sabotage activities and political reasons.

In a context of conflict and political unrest, total or partial Internet shutdowns have a detrimental impact on daily life in Yemen. Restrictions on internet access affect Yemenis' right to communicate, to access and exchange information, and other basic human rights such as health and education at a time where Yemen is experiencing one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

YemenNet represents the primary internet service provider in Yemen, apart from Aden Net, recently established by the internationally-recognised government with a subscriber base of nearly ٢٠,٠٠٠. As the majority of Yemenis continue to depend on YemenNet, any total or partial internet shutdowns and blockages of communication and social media platforms carried out by the company affect all Yemeni governorates, with the exception of the approximately ٢٠,٠٠٠ subscribers to Aden Net.

As part of this deteriorating situation of freedom of expression and the continuous crackdown on freedom of expression and media freedom, it was reported that since Houthi forces took control of the Yemeni capital in ٢٠١٥, a dozen news websites that are classified as not aligned with the Houthi forces' authorities are currently blocked. The news outlets include AL-Masdar Online, Khabar Agency, Mereb Press, AL-Wahdawi net , Aleshteraky.Net and other major news outlets such as Al Arabiya, Al-Jazeera, and Al Arabi Al Jadid. The blocking represents a serious violation of the fundamental right to press freedom as well as citizens' right to access to information and knowledge.

We call on the Houthi de facto forces to cease internet shutdown measures and immediately lift the blockage on news websites and social media platforms in Yemen in line with the country's obligations under the ICCPR

Signatories

- ARTICLE 19
- The Gulf Centre for Human Rights
- DT Institute
- Tech&Peace
- The Tor Project
- The Studies & Economic Media Center
- Yemeni Media Freedom Observatory
- National Organization for Defending Rights and Freedoms
- Yemen Future Foundation for Culutre and Media Development
- American Center for Justice
- The Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations
- Marib Dam Foundation for Social Development
- Center for Strategic Studies to Support Women and Children
- YemenWomen Journalists Network
- Association of Abductees Mothers
- Free Media Center for Investigative Journalism
- Defense Foundation for Rights and Freedom
- Center of my Right for Support the Rights and Freedoms
- Media village for development and Information
- Abjad Center for Studies and Development
- Cultural Media Center
- Albelaad center for studies and media
- Musaala Organization for Human Rights
- ALkarama - Geneva
- Center for Political Public Opinion Studies and Research
- Mirrors Media For Development Center
- The Electronic Foundation for Humanitarian Media
- Sawasia Organization For Human Rights

4

- Monitoring Journalist Network
- Musawah Organization For Rights and Freedoms
- Qarar foundation for Media and Development
- TO BE Foundation For Rights & Freedoms
- Al-Amal Women's and Sociocultural Foundation
- Humanitarian Journalism Foundation
- Bahth Foundation for Development and Human Rights
- Dameer Foundation For Human Rights
- Mansa Foundation for Media And Development Studies
- Media Sac for Media and Development
- Wujud Foundation for Human Security
- Yemeni Legal Center
- The National Organization of Yemeni Reporters