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RIGHTS  
RADAR

# YEMEN: SUPPRESSING VOICES

A REPORT ON THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS SITUATION  
MAY 2017

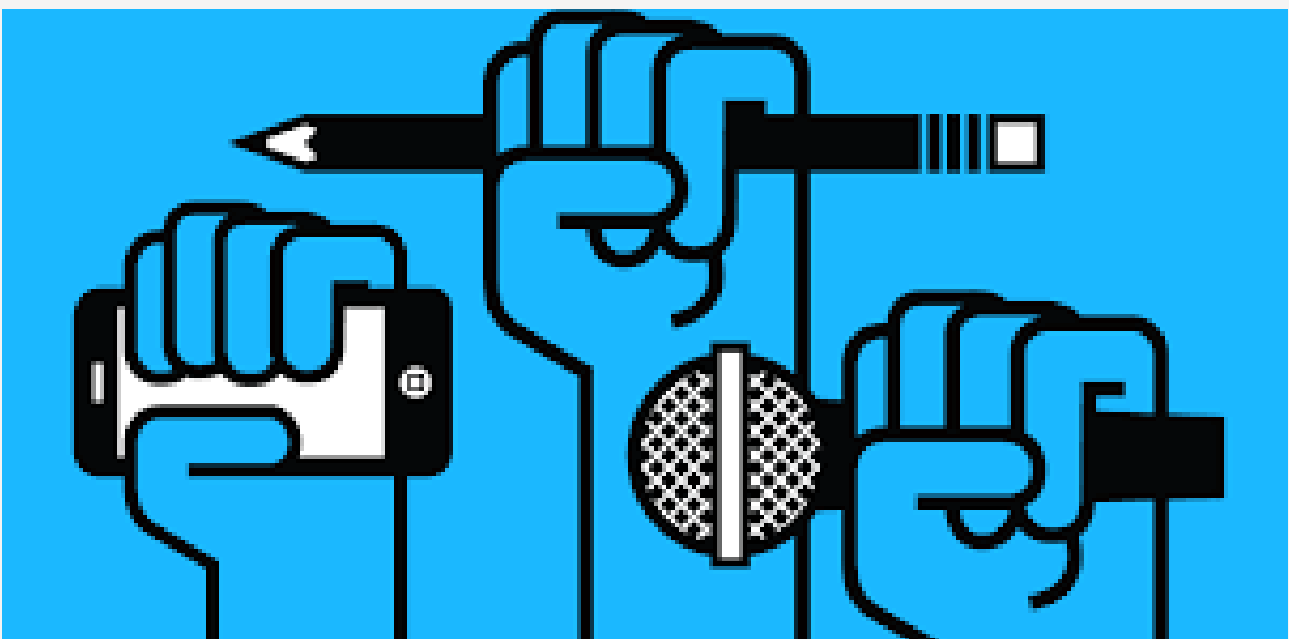


## GENERAL CONTEXT

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Press and media freedom and the freedom of speech witnessed a big leap during the 2011 uprising as part of the collective change that swept over the whole Arab region and as part of the Arab Spring revolution. But in 2014, it deteriorated dramatically in Yemen and the impacts are still being seen today. Since the end of 2014 until the beginning of 2017, the freedom of the press saw its worst days as the Houthi/Saleh militia controlled all public media outlets. They confiscated all private media buildings, and along with that, freedom of expression and freedom of the press were confiscated as well. The rights of press freedom and expression were severely oppressed in 2014 in a way not witnessed in Yemen since the political openness associated with the Yemeni unification in 1990. 2015 and 2016 saw the greatest number of reported violations against journalists and people working in the media by various parties in the conflict, according to Freedom Foundation, a pioneering NGO of media freedom in Yemen. Yemeni journalists and professionals who work in the media faced largest amount of killing, abducting, arresting, torturing, un-

fair trials, death penalty, murder threats and extreme campaigns against them. Journalists were forced to shut their mouths, and alternative media outlets were absent. The official media inside Yemen become one directional, lacking diversity. It only expresses the views of one side—the Houthi and Saleh group. Rights Radar informed that with the collapse of the state institutions in Yemen at the end of 2014 and being controlled by the Saleh and Houthi forces, the press and media community became terrified and unable to criticize those in control. The oppressive situation increased, stifling press and media freedom and placing more barriers, not only against the journalists of the traditional media outlets, but also restrictions on new media and social media. Many online news websites were shut down as they were not compatible with the goals and the views of the Houthi/Saleh forces. Many foreign news online websites were censored that are not in line with the new oppressive media policy forced by the Houthi. This was also accompanied by cutting the internet services in some areas of Yemen.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Along with the oppressive measures against media freedom, new appointments were made to those loyal to the Houthi group and they replaced staff of the previous governments. The Houthis took full control of all state media outlets and shut down all private media outlets critical to their views. They also confiscated their buildings and media equipment in 2014 and 2015. Therefore, many satellite channels were forced to move some of their offices and a limited number of their staff to work outside Yemen. The viewership has consequently declined as a result of the constant electricity blackouts, and other rea-

sons mostly concerning the negative content which is no longer appealing to the viewers. There was a wave of terror for media professionals working under the Houthi control, especially in Sana'a, the capital city. Thus, many journalists and staff working in media were forced to hide and run to other areas far away from the Houthi's firm grip. Some of them are suffering from a very difficult financial situation and other media professionals turned to social media to express their views, in the absence of other media outlets. However, with the stringent restrictions and threats, many professionals were



forced to hide and stay away from any media activity or to participate in social media. It is an unsafe environment for any independent press or media professional, especially those against the Houthis in some of their controlled areas. Many journalists or staff working in media, or human rights activists were subjected to killings, kidnapping, arbitrary arrest, or torture in prison in addition to being constantly threatened and chased. The circle of violations against media and press freedoms expanded to include all areas that were reached by the Houthis. Meanwhile other cases of violations of media freedom were reported by other parties such as the Arab Coalition and the Hadi and state affiliated troops in cities such as Aden, Hadhramout and Taizz, amongst others. According to the 2016 World Press Freedom Index, which includes 180 countries, Tunisia ranked 96th, emerging fairly well from the Arab Spring and surpassed the other Arab countries, rising 30 places in one year. Tunisia was ranked 164th during the ruling of the former president ruling Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. In 2015, the country was ranked 126th and rose 30 places in 2016. Meanwhile, Yemen ranked 170th amongst 180 countries and in exploring the various violations committed, 19 journalist and media men were killed in Yemen during 2015 and 2016. The most prominent journalists and people working in the media killed during 2015 and 2016 are: Abdulla Ozairan, media man, Abdul-Karim al-Khaiwani, a journalist, Mohammed Shamsan, media, Mohammed al-Yamani, photojournalist, Ahmed al-Shaibani, photojournalist, Yousef al-Izri,, TV correspondent, Abdullah Qabil, TV correspondent, Munir al-Haimi, TV producer, Suaad Hujairah, TV producer, Mighdad Mujali, TV correspon-

dent, Mubarak al-Abadi, TV correspondent, Hashim al-Hamran, TV correspondent, Mohammed al-Nawa'ah, TV correspondent, Abdul-Karim al-Ghorbani, TV correspondent, Khaled al-Washali, TV correspondent, and recently Awab al-Zubairi, photojournalist. In Sana'a, Abdul-Karim al-Khaiwani, 50, was assassinated by unknown armed individuals on Wednesday 18 March 2015. According to various sources, the armed assassins shot al-Khaiwani with live bullets while they were on their motorcycle near his house in Al-Rakkas Street in Sana'a. The same sources did not reveal the underlying reasons behind his assassination. However, sources

close to al-Khaiwani attributed it to his bold writing in the press and his vocal opinions during his career. Al-Khaiwani was a prominent journalist, writer, human rights activist and politician and a representative member of the Houthi group in the National Dialogue Conference.

In Taiz, a photojournalist, Awab Tareq al-Zubairi, was killed in November 18, 2016, in the explosion of a residential building bombed by the Houthi and Saleh forces with a network of mines before fleeing from Al-Askari neighborhood in eastern Taiz city. Tariq al-Zubairi, the father of Awab al-Zubairi, told Rights Radar that his son died in the bombing of the mine-loaded building by the Houthis. He was documenting and photographing the destruction sustained by the area because of the armed conflict between the Houthi militias and Saleh forces in one side, and the government and the Popular Resistance from another side. He added that his son was a photojournalist with Taiz News Network, a



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IN YEMEN DURING 2015 – 2016  
INCLUDING 8 KILLED IN 2015  
AND 11 OTHER KILLED IN  
2016**

local media outlet, but he was also working with other online news websites, despite still being a media student in Taiz University. According to a statement Taizz News Network, the website where Awab was working for before his death: «There were a number of photojournalists who took shelter in a three-floor building. This building is located in Al-Askari neighborhood, on the front line of the conflict, in the east of Taiz. The building collapsed when the mines planted inside it exploded, leading to the death of al-Zubairi, while the others survived.» Awab al-Zubairi is reported to be the third photojournalist to be killed by Houthi's and Saleh's militias in Taiz alone in 2016. Moreover, Ahmed al-Shai-bani, the cameraman of the Yemen government channel, was killed by a Houthi sniper in Alhasb area, in Taiz city. According to his colleagues' testimony who were present during the incident «A sniper from the Houthi militia shot at the photojournalist Ahmed al-Shai-bani which led him to be killed immediately, when he was covering the armed confrontations between Houthi and Saleh militias on one side and the governmental forces and popular resistance in Taizz from the other.» Amid such gloomy situations, the political speech has become loaded with hate and

**DURING  
2016 AT LEAST  
11 JOURNALISTS WERE  
KILLED IN YEMEN, 7 OF THEM  
KILLED BY HOUTHIS- SALEH MI-  
LITIA ATTACKS AND 4 OTHERS  
KILLED BY SAUDI-LED ARAB  
.COALITION AIR RAIDS**

violent speech. Along with such a dialogue, the freedoms of media have faded away because of the killing, oppression, threats and terror directed towards those working in the media. These practices by those in power aim to silence the voices critical to them and to their ally the former President Saleh. They have continued their violations on media freedoms and tightened their grip over media outlets, silencing them. They don't respond to human rights condemnations or calls to stop their ill practices of abusing freedom and press rights, nor to demands to guarantee the free practices of those rights and stop their control over private and governmental media outlets and institutions. The violations of press and media freedoms in Yemen has been continuing in an unprecedented way since early 2015. The Houthis and Saleh forces imposed a monopoly over the press in the capital Sana'a, suffocated press freedom and placed the media under a bloody gun. After the liberation of the media after the 2011 uprising from the governmental tight control and breaking the fear barrier, we found the media in 2016 subject to violence, killing, oppression and constantly under threat and fear.

## MURDERED JOURNALISTS

During 2015 and 2016, at least 19 Yemeni journalists and media men from various parties were killed in Yemen. 8 journalists of them were killed during 2015 and the 11 others were killed during 2016, three parties were behind the killing of these journalists. The parties behind the killing of 11 Yemeni journalists during 2016 are Houthi - Saleh militia, which killed 7 journalists by live ammunition and artillery shells, and Saudi-led Arab coalition forces whose air strikes killed 4 others. Three sides were behind the killing of journalists and media men in Yemen during 2015, the Houthi-Saleh militia, Saudi-led Arab coalition forces and al-Qaeda militant group. The names of journalists and media personnel killed in 2016 are the correspondent of Voice of America Meqdad Mujalli, who was killed on January 18 with an air strike on the Hammam Kharef district of Sana'a province.

of Arab coalition on their home in Sana'a. A cameraman collaborating with the state-run Yemen TV Ahmad al-Shaibani, who was shot dead by Houthi and Saleh militia snipers on 16 February 2016 while covering events in the city of Taizz. A freelance photographer Mohammed al-Yamani, who was killed on 21 March 2016 by Houthis – Saleh snipers during his coverage the confrontation in the west city of Taizz. The 2 journalists Abdullah Ozairan and Musaed Harethy who were killed on 29 May 2016 by the Houthi-Saleh militia during their coverage of the confrontations in Shabwa province, east of Yemen. Abdul Karim al-Jarbani, a TV reporter who was killed on July 22, 2016 by Houthi-Saleh militants while covering confrontations in the town of Midi in Hajjah province, west of Yemen. A freelance journalist and contributor for several local and international media outlets,



### Mohammed Al-Yamani

#### The killed photojournalist



The cameraman of Houthi-owned TV channel Hashim Huamran, who was killed on 22 January 2016 by an air strike of the Arab Coalition Forces in Saada province, north of Yemen. The two media men, who were working in the Yemen public TV controlled by the Houthis and Saleh authority in Sana'a, Munir al-Hakimi and his wife Saadah Hujairah, who were killed on 10 February 2016 by an air raid

Mubarak al-Abbadi, who was killed on 5 August 2016 by an artillery shelling of the Houthi - Saleh militias in Al-Jouf province, east of Yemen. Photojournalist, Awab Tariq al-Zubairi, who was killed on 18 November 2016 by a landmine planted by Houthi and Saleh militia in a residential building in Taizz city.

## JOURNALISTS IN DETENTIONS

In addition, there are still 22 journalists and media men in detentions in Yemen, 21 of them are in the Houthi and Saleh detentions. Some of them are still undergoing torture since their abduction in June 2015, including the journalist Abdul Khalik Amran. Amran's family confirmed that their son was severely tortured during his detention period leading to him entirely losing his ability to move by the end of November 2016. Amran's family informed the concerned authorities in the capital Sana'a of Amran's poor health conditions, and called for his transfer to the hospital before his health got worse. However, none of these authorities responded to their demands, they even doubled his torture to prevent his family from communicating with local and foreign human rights organizations. The other journalist in detention is the reporter of Saleh-owned TV channel

al-Jubeihi, Faisal al-Aswad, Mohammed al-Selwi and Abdullaah Obad. Moreover, Muhammad al-Moaqri, who is still being detained by (AQAP) militants in hidden place in Hadhramout province, east of Yemen. Over the past two years, dozens of journalists and media personnel have been abducted and detained by the Houthis and Saleh militia, by the AQAP militants, as well as by government forces. However, some of them were released after varying periods ranging from several weeks to a few months. Ibrahim Al-Majdhoub, was the latest case, who released by the Houthi – Saleh group on 25 March 2017 after spending about a year and nine months in Houthi-Saleh detention. On June 9, 2015, the Houthi and Saleh forces kidnapped nine journalists aged between 23 and 31 who were staying at the Palace of Dreams hotel in Sana'a and took them to



### Ahmed Al-Shaibani

#### The killed Cameraman

in Hadhramout Mohammed Al-Moqri, who is abducted and detained by militants of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The journalists who are still in the prisons of Houthi and Saleh are Tawfiq Al Mansouri, Abdul Khaleq Amran, Hisham Taramoum, Hassan Annab, Essam Balghaith, Hisham Al Shehab, Salah Al Qa'idi, Akram Al Walaidi, Harith Humaid, Abdullah Al Moneifi, Hisham Al Yousefi, Hussein Al Aissi, , Wahid al-Sufi, Tayseer al-Samari, Yousef Ajlan, Yahya



an unknown destination. On September 3, 2015, Alkarama Foundation, a Swiss organization, issued an urgent appeal to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to intervene regarding the nine journalists, and calling upon the Houthi group to immediately disclose their whereabouts and to release them immediately. The organization attributed the arrest and abduction of the nine journalists to their activity in documenting human rights violations.

In their testimony to Rights Radar, the families of the victims say that the Houthi and Saleh forces took first: Abdulkhaliq Amran, Akram Al-Walidi, Harith Humaid, Hassan An-nab, Hisham Al-Yousefi, Hisham Tarmoum, Haitham Al-Shehab, Essam Balghaith, Tawfiq Al Mansouri, and on July 3, 2015 they were transferred to the Anti-Terror Unit of the Criminal Investigation Department of the Ministry of the Interior in Al-Adl Street, where they were held incommunicado before being transferred to an unknown destination. They were subsequently found in a prison belonging to the Political Security Apparatus in Sana'a. After the kidnapping and disappearance of the nine journalists, the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate, a member of the International Federation of Journalists, and other Yemeni civil society organizations issued

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AND AQAP.**

numerous calls demanding the Houthis to release them. On July 1, 2015, a campaign was organized by a group of organizations that defend rights and freedoms calling for their release. The families of the victims also organized several protest vigils in front of the Attorney General's Office and security headquarters in Sana'a and sent many complaints to the United Nations Special Envoy to Yemen, but to no avail. On February 20, 2016, members of the Houthi militia in Dhamar province abducted journalists Abdullah al-Munaifi and Hussein al-Aisi from Dhamar city, and took them to an unknown location.

A number of civil society organizations in Dhamar province issued a statement condemning the abduction of the journalists. It also condemned the brutal campaign launched by the Houthi militia against the press and its workers in Dhamar since it entered the governorate in early October 2014. It has considered these practices a desperate attempt to silence the voices of truth and any voices that oppose their practices and corruption. On January 2, 2017, the Houthi and Saleh militia in Taizz province kidnapped journalist Tayseer al-Samiri as he passed by a militia checkpoint in his hometown of Khadeer district of Taizz province. According to his family, the militia who were stationed at a checkpoint at the entrance of Khadeer district kidnapped al-Samiri as he was heading towards the district market and transferred him to an unknown



destination, and they continue to prevent his family from visiting him or phoning him. According to human rights and media sources, al-Sam'i is being subjected to severe physical torture by the Houthis. Sources close to al-Sami's family said that their son is being «electrocuted along with the engineer who was kidnapped from the governorate and his name is Mohammed al-Saberi.» Al-Sam'i was kidnapped two months after the militia shot his younger brother as he was taking care of their sheep flock in a valley in the Sami' area. Militants stationed at the checkpoint kidnapped dozens of citizens from the districts of Sami' and al-Khadeer and transferred them to unknown prisons. According to the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate, the journalists arbitrarily imprisoned in the prisons of the Houthi and Saleh militia are suffering from poor health conditions and are denied medical treatment.


Tayseer al-Same'i is being tortured in his prison in Sana'a and his health has deteriorated as a result, while journalist Abdul-Khaleq Amran suffers from back pain, hearing and stomach infections, according to the member of Syndicate, Nabil al-Osaidi. Al-Osaidi said in a statement that journalist Akram al-Walidi is in dire need of hemorrhoids and colon operations, while journalist Haitham al-Shehab suffers from severe coughing and chest pain. Journalist Tawfiq al-Mansouri suffers from a pain in his eyes to the extent that he does not see with one eye and suffers from back and joint pain, according to Osaidi. Al-Osaidi said that the journalist Salah al-Qa'idi suffers from pain in his ears and his hearing is impaired as a result of the torture he sustained. Essam Belghaith and Hisham Al-Yousufi suffer from pain in their back, joints and chest.



## DEATH PENALTY

As previously mentioned, there were some cases of executions, via death penalty as well as illegal killings, against Yemeni journalists by the coup authority which adopts a hate speech against journalists. Therefore, they become more vulnerable to death threats and the limitation of their rights, and the series of killings to suppress media voices did not stop. For example, late Sunday February 12, 2017 the former dean of the mass communication college of Sana'a Dr. Ali al-Buraihi was targeted by an assassination attempt by unknown individuals on a motorcycle in al-Rakkas Street, in the center of Sana'a. He was showered by bullets but narrowly escaped death. The incident happened after he received a death threat over the phone call by an unknown caller, because of his syndicate activity in Sana'a University. The incident was considered a message not to al-Buraihi but to all academics in Sana'a University, who were on a strike for the second month in a row, to protest not receiving their salaries for five months. During the past two years, many journalists and people working in media have fallen victim to the Houthi and Saleh snipers, either killed or injured. At least one journalist was killed by a coalition air strike while doing his job. The investigative journalist Mohammed al-Absi died from poisoning on Tuesday 20 December 2016. Due to his exceptional role in fighting corruption, suspicions were raised

about the cause of his death. After talks with his family and some of his close friends, the burial ceremonies were postponed and the body was stored in the morgue of the Kuwait Hospital. A team was formed to follow the case and it joined the general prosecution to supervise the forensic autopsy and they sent samples for examination to the forensic and criminal evidence lab in the Jordanian capital Amman. According to the statement of the follow-up team, the final investigations and forensic analysis revealed that the Yemeni journalist Mohammed al-Absi died from poisoning suffocated with carbon monoxide. The statement, issued on February 5, 2017, stated that the substance (carboxyhemoglobin) was found in Al-Absi's blood samples with 65% saturation, which is considered fatal. Based on this result, the family of the journalist Al-Absi and the follow-up team called on the Public Prosecution to initiate a transparent and efficient investigation into the circumstances of the death, in order to ascertain all the reasons and circumstances surrounding it. The sudden death of Al-Absi has raised suspicions about the involvement of the coup authorities in the capital Sana'a in his death, especially in light of his recent reports published on the black market run by Houthis, and the real entities responsible for the siege of Yemenis and the large corruption deals and large oil companies



**Yahya Al-Jubaihi**  
Journalist facing  
death penalty



which belong to leaders of the Houthi group. In another context, in an attempt to legitimize the abuses and violations of journalists, in July 2016, Saleh and Houthi forces transferred 10 journalists to the Houthi-controlled Central Security's Counterterrorism Unit on charges of communicating with foreign countries (they mean Saudi Arabia). In an unprecedented event, on April 12, 2017, the Houthi-Saleh run Central Security's Counterterrorism Unit sentenced journalist Yahya al-Jubaihi to death on charges of communicating with «an enemy state». He was sentenced in just one trial without having the right to legally present himself and defend himself. Legal experts believe the Houthi-Saleh authorities are using the

legislation and the international human rights treaties and agreements. In addition, they are conducted in exceptional times and circumstances where the entire judicial system became dysfunctional after the Houthi Coup d'état in Yemen. "These court sessions violate all principles essential to guarantee a fair trial," they added. Rights Radar calls on all international organizations concerned with freedom of expression and human rights to quickly move to put a pressure on the Houthi-Saleh authority to cancel the issued sentence against the journalist al-Jubaihi and to stop the hearing sessions against the other journalists, and immediately release them. Earlier, on February 1, 2017, the Houthi reb-

## Awab Al-Zubairi

### The killed photojournalist



Judiciary System as an oppressive tool against journalists, which is a crime in itself. Al-Jubaihi's arbitrary detention by the Houthi-Saleh armed forces on September 6, 2016 came as a result of his refusal to acknowledge the Houthi coup against the internationally-recognized government in Yemen. Before his detention, al-Jubaihi was a media advisor in the Yemeni cabinet, and a media lecturer in Sana'a University. Rights Radar condemned the death penalty for the Journalist Yahya Abdul-Raqeab al-Jubaihi, 60, issued by a court controlled by the Houthi rebels and its ally the former Ali Abdullah Saleh, in Sana'a, the capital. According to Yemeni legal experts, these hearings lack the fundamental legal procedures and justice. They violated the Yeme-

els announced that the Al-Saida channel in Sana'a and several of its employees had been tried on the basis of a lawsuit filed by the Houthi-controlled Interior Ministry last Ramadan over the «Hami Hamak» [My Concern is Your Concern] series. The Ministry said that the Series was offensive to its soldiers. The complaint by the Ministry of the Houthis submitted to the Press and Publications Prosecution was an indictment against the director of the channel Hamed al-Shamiri, who is outside Yemen, who was described by the court as an escaped criminal. The prosecutor also accused Amer al-Bousi, who played the role of (Fandam Bairam) in the series, of also escaping from justice. They believe this role is offensive to Houthi- Saleh militants.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- We call upon the international community to step up to its ethical and legal responsibilities for what is taking place in Yemen regarding the violation of human rights. The international community should make a greater effort to provide immediate support to civilians according to the international treaties and agreements especially Geneva agreement.
- The international community needs to put pressure on the Houthi group to stop its detention's campaigns for its opponents and to release all the detainees in its detentions and stop the torture them and abide by the international human rights laws that protect human lives and preserve their dignity.
- We call on the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh to stop participating in the violation of human rights and he should cease using his loyal military troops and his party insurgents as an armed militia, in committing human rights violations.
- The international community needs to ensure the security forces loyal to the government of President Abd Rabu Mansour Hadi to abide by the law and the humanitarian and international treaties. They should avoid violating human rights during its practice of authority or inside the prison and detention centers.

# RIGHTS RADAR

## WHO WE ARE?

Rights Radar is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that monitors, promotes and defends human rights in the Arab world. It was founded by a group of Arab human rights defenders and activists. We monitor, document and report violations against human rights, as well as provide advocacy and legal support for victims and capacity building for human rights activists. We cover all topics and areas of human rights, including public liberties and freedom of expression, women's rights, children's rights, disability rights, prisoner rights, right to justice, refugee rights and fundamental rights.

Rights Radar works through a wide network of professional reporters and monitors on the ground, using the latest techniques in monitoring and documenting human rights cases.

## OUR OBJECTIVES:

- 1- Monitoring and documenting violations against human rights in the Arab World.
- 2- Providing advocacy and legal support for Arab victims of human rights.
- 3- Capacity building and leadership developing for Arab human rights activists.
- 4- Networking and communicating with international human rights organizations.

## OUR VISION:

To provide excellence in monitoring and documenting the status of human rights in the Arab world.

## OUR MISSION:

Rights Radar monitors and documents human rights abuses in the Arab world in order to reduce violations against human rights and track the perpetrators, advancing the principle of no-impunity. We do this using professional and proven method, providing advocacy and legal support for Arab victims of human rights violations, creating training opportunities for human rights' capacity building and leadership, as well as networking and communicating with international human rights organizations.

## OUR VALUES:

- 1- Independency and balance.
- 2- Credibility and excellence.
- 3- Professionalism and responsibility.



# RIGHTS RADAR

## YEMEN: SUPPRESSING VOICES

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