



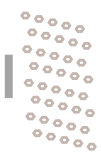
Women
Journalists
Without
Chains

Yemen: The Houthi Architecture of Terror and Systematic Civic Erasure Geneva

MAY 2026

الله أكبر
الموت لأمريكا
الموت لإسرائيل
الموتة على اليهود
النصر للإسلام

اختطاف
تعذيب
إخفاء قسري



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

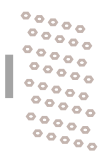
The human rights landscape in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen has undergone a catastrophic transformation throughout late 2025 and the first half of 2026. Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC) presents this expanded investigative report to alert the international community to a rapid, orchestrated slide into a “closed-loop” repressive state. Our documentation reveals that the Houthi militia has moved beyond sporadic acts of violence toward a comprehensive, institutionalized system of subjugation.

Through a terrifying apparatus of abductions, enforced disappearances, systematic torture, and extrajudicial detention, the militia is actively working to dismantle the final vestiges of independent civil society. By `criminalizing freedom of expression and weaponizing the state’s judicial and security organs, the Houthi leadership is entrenching an environment where all public activity is suppressed.

Crucially, WJWC warns that the patterns identified in this report—characterized by their widespread and systematic nature—reach the legal threshold of crimes against humanity and war crimes. This report provides a detailed evidentiary record of these violations, categorizing the targeting of women, journalists, educators, and children, while demanding immediate international intervention to halt the descent into total lawlessness.

I. METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

This report is based on primary documentation collected by WJWC’s field monitoring teams, direct testimonies from survivors and families of the disappeared, legal filings, and verified press reports. Despite the extreme risks associated with human rights monitoring in Houthi-held territories, our teams have verified the cases listed herein through a multi-source corroboration process. The scope of this report covers the period from late 2025 through May 2026, focusing on the governorates of Sana’a, Ibb, Dhamar, Raymah, and Hajjah.



II. THE LANDSCAPE OF FEAR: AN ORCHESTRATED REPRESSION

The escalation witnessed in early 2026 is not a series of isolated security incidents; rather, it is a deliberate policy aimed at the total neutralization of any independent or professional presence in Yemen. The Houthi militia has constructed a repressive environment that thrives on the “invisibility” of its victims. By utilizing secret detention centers—often referred to as “black sites” or “hidden houses”—the militia circumvents any form of judicial oversight, leaving families in a state of perpetual psychological torture.



Systematic Violations in Houthi-Controlled Areas

TARGETED GROUPS



Civilians



Women



Journalists



Teachers



Abduction



Torture



PATTERNS OF ABUSE



Torture



Abduction

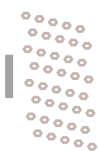


Repression of Expression



Enforced Disappearance





The Erosion of the Rule of Law

In Houthi-controlled areas, the judiciary has been effectively hollowed out, serving as a rubber stamp for the security apparatus. Detention, torture, and disappearance are no longer anomalies; they are the primary instruments of political and social control. WJWC’s findings suggest that the militia’s security structure operates as a “shadow state,” where commanders of local police stations and intelligence bureaus hold absolute power over life and death, entirely detached from the Ministry of Interior’s formal regulations.

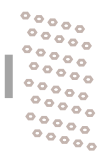
The Profile of Violations

Violation Category	Primary Targets	Core Objective
Enforced Disappearance	Activists, Women, UN/NGO Staff	Psychological terror and information suppression
Ideological Coercion	Teachers, Students, Imams	Long-term social engineering and recruitment.
Judicial Extortion	Lawyers, Human Rights Defenders	Dismantling the legal defense infrastructure
Lethal Neglect	Political Prisoners, Elderly Detainees	Physical liquidation through medical deprivation

III. THE WAR ON WOMEN: GENDER-BASED REPRESSION

Women in northern Yemen are facing an unprecedented campaign of gender-based violence. The Houthi militia has targeted women not only for their dissent but as a means of breaking the social fabric of the community.

Estimates indicate hundreds of women are subjected to arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance within a vast network of secret facilities operating without judicial or international oversight. Corroborated by UN Panel of Experts reports, these systematic violations include torture, incommunicado detention, and sexual violence. In these unofficial prisons, detainees are routinely denied basic safeguards, family contact, and critical healthcare, reflecting a widespread and grave pattern of institutionalized gender-based persecution.



Houthi Violations Against Women

Abduction, enforced disappearance, torture,
and denial of medical care

01 – Abduction from Homes



Houthi militias abduct women from their homes in towns and villages without legal orders, taking them to unknown destinations.



02 – Enforced Disappearance in Secret Prisons



Women are forcibly detained in secret and unserved prisons without judicial oversight where their fate is kept hidden.



03 – Torture and Medical Neglect



Detained women face torture and deliberate denial of care, without institutional support, leading to serious health deterioration.

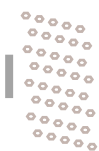


04 – Deprivation of Contact



Women are deprived of visits and communication with their families, leaving them isolated and without basic rights.





Case Study: The Targeting of International Expertise (Fathia al-Hadda)

On April 12, 2026, the militia conducted a violent raid on the home of Fathia Hussein Ali al-Hadda on Ha'il Street in Sana'a. During the operation, her residence was looted, and Al-Hadda was forcibly taken to an unknown location.



Al-Hadda's background is significant: a former employee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Sudan, she had returned to Sana'a to serve as a kindergarten teacher. Her abduction represents a dangerous escalation in the militia's campaign against individuals with ties to international organizations. By targeting those who have worked within the humanitarian framework, the

Houthi leadership signals a total rejection of international norms.

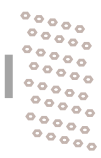
The "Hidden Houses": The Disappearance of Ashwaq al-Shamiri

The case of Ashwaq Suleiman Qaed al-Shamiri (47) illustrates the horrifying reality of the "black site" system. Abducted during a massive military raid in the Andalus neighborhood of Sana'a on November 25, 2025, Al-Shamiri was taken after her home was surrounded by armored vehicles.



Months later, her fate remains unknown. Credible information suggests she is being held in a secret facility known as "al-Dar al-Makhfi" (The Hidden House). These facilities operate outside the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior. Detainees are routinely denied visits, communication, and legal counsel. The psychological toll on Al-Shamiri's family, who have searched for her in

vain across multiple security bureaus, constitutes a form of collective punishment.



The Silencing of Public Activism: Sahar al-Khawlani



In January 2026, activist Sahar al-Khawlani and her husband were abducted following a raid on their Sana'a residence. This operation was characterized by extreme brutality, specifically designed to terrorize their young children. Al-Khawlani had previously been subjected to repeated harassment due to her public advocacy. Her detention without charges or disclosure of location is a stark reminder that even the most prominent female voices are not safe.

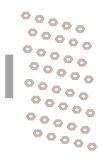
The Crisis of Medical Neglect: Hanan Shu'ai al-Muntasir

Perhaps the most egregious example of the militia's cruelty is the case of Hanan Shu'ai al-Muntasir (52). Abducted in 2019 and subjected to a 12-year sentence following a trial based on confessions extracted under torture, Al-Muntasir is currently facing a slow death.

Her mother's testimony reveals a catastrophic deterioration in her health. Hanan is suffering from serious medical complications, yet prison authorities have consistently refused her transfer to a specialized hospital. This deliberate medical neglect is a form of torture, intended to break the spirit of the detainee.

IV. CRIMINALIZING SPEECH: THE SURVEILLANCE STATE

Freedom of expression in northern Yemen has been effectively criminalized. The Houthi militia has established an extensive surveillance apparatus to monitor journalists and private citizens alike.



The Persecution of Media Professionals



On March 7, 2026, photographer Yasser Hassan was abducted from his home in Yarim, Ibb Governorate. His “crime” was the documentation of the collapse of the historic “Government House” (*Dar al-Hukuma*). In a state that fears the truth, the act of photographing a crumbling building was deemed a threat to national security.



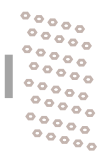
Similarly, on March 28, 2026, journalist Fuad al-Maliki, deputy director of the Ibb Media Office, was disappeared. He stands accused of managing an anonymous Facebook account that criticized corruption and mismanagement. Even after his abduction, the account continued to post, suggesting the militia’s paranoia is targeting individuals based on suspicion rather than evidence.

The Criminalization of Economic Grievance

As the humanitarian crisis deepens, the militia has moved to silence those who speak out against the suspension of public sector salaries.



- Nidal Tawfiq al-Qaifi: Abducted in March 2026 in al-Bayda for social media posts criticizing security chaos.



- Hamoud Noor: A physics teacher in Hajjah, abducted on April 17, 2026. Noor was assaulted and taken to an unknown location after he posted Facebook articles criticizing the non-payment of teachers' salaries and rampant corruption.

V. BATTLE FOR THE FUTURE: EDUCATION AND IDEOLOGY

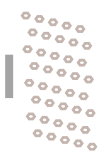
One of the most long-term and damaging aspects of the Houthi project is the forced indoctrination of the youth. The militia's "summer camps" are central to this effort, serving as hubs for sectarian mobilization.

The Persecution of Educators

Educators who refuse to participate in these programs face immediate and violent repercussions.



- Ali Yahya Atif: A veteran educational supervisor in Amran Governorate, Atif was abducted on April 18, 2026. Atif's refusal to facilitate "cultural courses" for children has made him a repeated target of the security apparatus.



- Ibrahim al-Najdi: The principal of Othman bin Affan School in Dhamar was abducted in April 2026 for refusing to permit militia-run summer camp activities inside his school.

Religious Purges in Raymah

Throughout April 2026, WJWC documented a systematic campaign in Raymah Governorate to replace independent imams and preachers with militia loyalists. By abducting those who refuse to use the pulpit for Houthi recruitment, the militia is ensuring that schools and mosques become instruments of indoctrination.

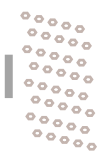
VI. CHILD ABDUCTIONS AND VILLAGE RAIDS

The militia's field operations have become increasingly brazen, targeting children during their most vulnerable moments.

Case of Marwan al-Madhrahi

On April 9, 2026, 14-year-old Marwan Fikri Dahan al-Madhrahi was intercepted while returning from his school exams in Ibb. Armed elements, led by Abu Hamza al-Hamzi, reportedly chased the child and fired live ammunition over his head to force his surrender.

This abduction was part of a larger military raid on Bayt al-Madhrahi village, where militia forces stormed homes and terrorized the community. Such raids are often used as “collective punishment” for villages perceived as insufficiently loyal.



Case of Younis Al-Shuja'



On April 18, 2026, the Houthi militia abducted 24-year-old Younis Al-Shuja' from his shop in Ibb city. Disappeared without charge or disclosed reason, his case typifies the ongoing campaign of arbitrary detention targeting individuals for personal expression or civil activity. This incident underscores the broader architecture of repression, where citizens are systematically seized from public spaces to stifle independent voices and maintain a climate of fear.

Case of Hamza Al-Faqih



On April 23, 2026, the Houthi militia abducted 25-year-old university student Hamza Ahmed Al-Faqih at a security checkpoint while he was traveling from Sana'a to Rima Governorate. Stopped without legal justification, he was transferred to a prison under the First District Security Administration in Barbou' Bani Khouli. This incident highlights the systematic targeting of students and the use of checkpoints as sites for arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance.

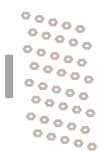
VII. DISMANTLING THE LEGAL DEFENSE SYSTEM

To ensure their system of abduction remains unchallenged, the Houthi militia has launched a direct assault on the legal profession.

The Persecution of Abdulmajeed Sabra

Abdulmajeed Sabra is Yemen's most prominent defender of political abductees. His abduction from his Sana'a office on September 25, 2025, was a calculated move to strike the heart of the human rights community.

Reports indicate that Sabra has been subjected to systematic extortion. He was

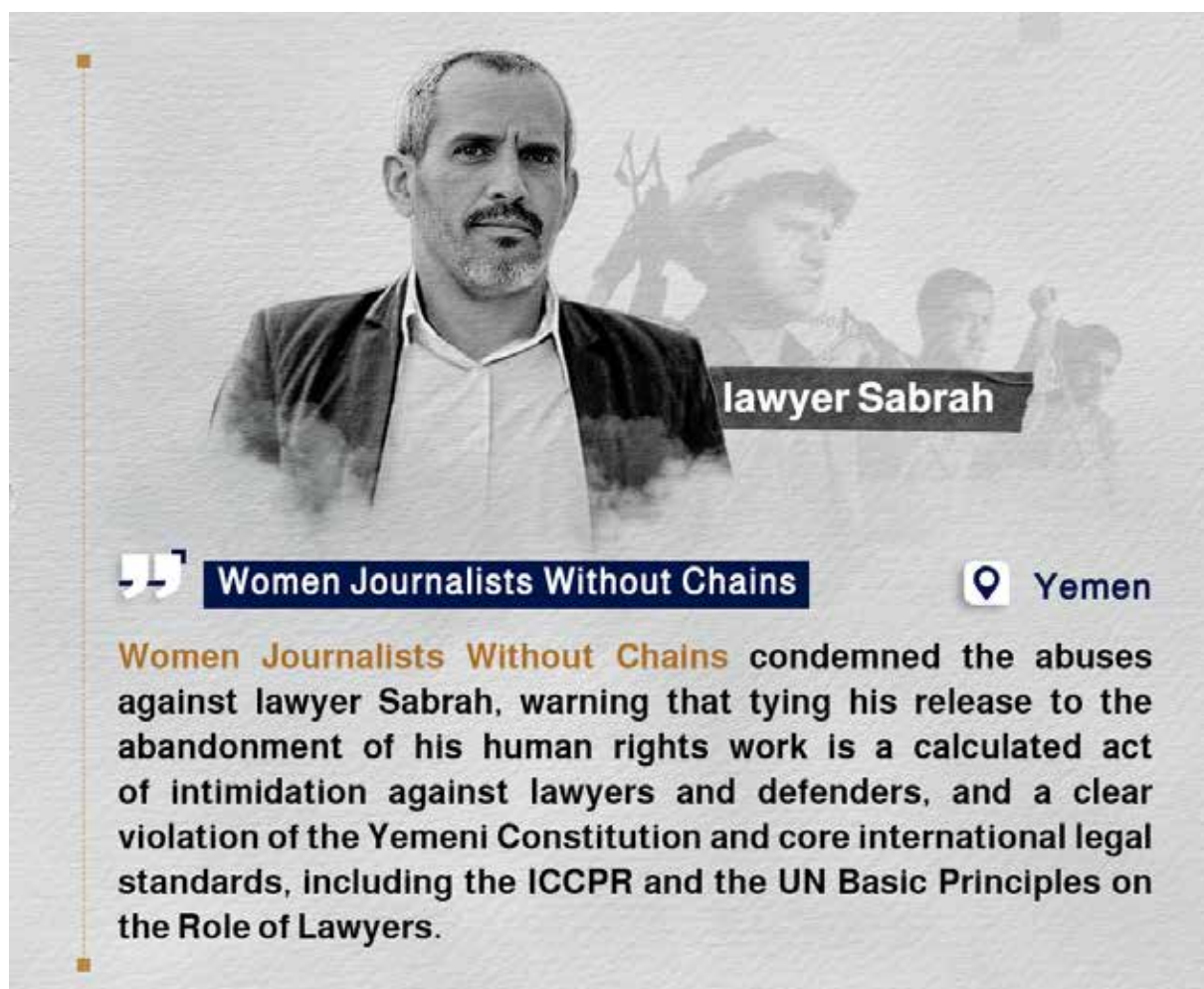


offered his freedom only if he agreed to:

1. Cease all human rights advocacy.
2. Abandon the defense of current abductees.
3. Delete his social media presence.



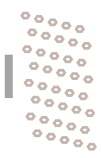
This unlawful coercion is a direct violation of the independence of the legal profession. Despite Sabra's coerced compliance, the militia has refused to release him. His current health status—compromised by a hunger strike—is a matter of grave international concern.



lawyer Sabrah

Women Journalists Without Chains **Yemen**

Women Journalists Without Chains condemned the abuses against lawyer Sabrah, warning that tying his release to the abandonment of his human rights work is a calculated act of intimidation against lawyers and defenders, and a clear violation of the Yemeni Constitution and core international legal standards, including the ICCPR and the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.



The Enforced Disappearance of Bashir al-Maqtari



Since April 2024, the Houthi militia has arbitrarily detained Bashir Salam Muqbil al-Muqatri (55), an advisor at the General Authority of Civil Aviation in Sana'a. After being lured via telephone and abducted from a street by armed men, he was forcibly transferred to a military intelligence headquarters where he remains without judicial oversight. His health has seriously deteriorated due to inhumane conditions and medical neglect, which may amount to cruel or degrading treatment. Prevented from accessing legal defense or challenging his detention, al-Muqatri's disappearance has forced his family into severe economic and social decline following the loss of their primary breadwinner.

VIII. THE FATAL COST OF IMPUNITY: DEATHS IN CUSTODY

The most irreversible violation is the rising tide of deaths occurring within, or immediately following, detention.

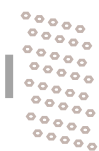


- Ahmed Abdullah Saleh al-Helmani (71): A prominent educator in Dhamar, Al-Helmani was released in early February 2026 in a state of physical ruin. Suffering from paralysis and blindness caused by his treatment in detention, he died just days after reaching his family.

- Hassan al-Yafai: Found dead in a Jibla district prison on April 4, 2026. Despite having completed his sentence, Al-Yafai was kept in unlawful detention. The militia's claim of "suicide" remains unverified by any independent investigation, raising concerns of a cover-up for a death resulting from torture.

IX. LEGAL ANALYSIS: CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY AND WAR CRIMES

Under international law, the acts documented in this report are not merely isolated human rights violations; they represent a coordinated and systematic



attack on the civilian population of Yemen. These violations are analyzed under two primary frameworks of international criminal law:

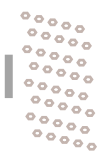
- **Crimes Against Humanity:** Pursuant to Article 7 of the Rome Statute, the widespread and systematic practice of abduction, enforced disappearance, and torture constitutes Crimes Against Humanity when committed as part of an organizational or state policy. The evidence indicates that these acts are not the result of rogue elements but are institutionalized practices targeting specific professional and social groups—such as journalists, educators, and women—to ensure total social control and the elimination of dissent.
- **War Crimes:** Given the context of the non-international armed conflict in Yemen, these acts also violate Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol II. The deliberate targeting of non-combatants, including children, teachers, and university students, along with the extraction of confessions through torture and the denial of life-saving medical care, are explicitly defined as War Crimes. These actions directly violate the protections afforded to persons not taking an active part in hostilities, imposing a clear and urgent obligation on the international community to ensure accountability and prevent continued impunity.

X. CONCLUSION AND CALLS TO ACTION

The evidence compiled by Women Journalists Without Chains paints a picture of a society under siege. The “repressive pattern” identified is expanding, emboldened by the silence of the international community.

WJWC issues the following urgent demands:

1. To the UN Security Council: Establish an independent international commission of inquiry with the mandate to investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity in Houthi-controlled areas.
2. To the International Criminal Court (ICC): Prioritize the situation in Yemen and begin the process of identifying those responsible for the systematic policy of enforced disappearance.
3. To the Houthi Leadership: Immediately and unconditionally release all political abductees, including Abdulmajid Sabra, Hanan al-Muntasir, and Fathia



al-Hadda. Close all unofficial detention facilities and allow the Red Cross (ICRC) immediate access to all prisoners.

4. To the International Humanitarian Community: Cease all coordination that lends legitimacy to the militia's repressive organs and demand protection for staff who have been targeted.

5. To the Human Rights Council: Ensure that the "blackout" of information in northern Yemen is lifted through rigorous monitoring and reporting.

The time for diplomatic caution has passed. The systematic destruction of Yemeni civil society and the physical liquidation of its members demand a decisive, principled international response. Silence in the face of such documented atrocities is, in itself, a form of complicity.