



**“WE DID NOT KNOW IF WE WOULD
DIE FROM BULLETS OR HUNGER”**

Civilian Harm and Local Protection Measures in Yemen

ABOUT CENTER FOR CIVILIANS IN CONFLICT

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) is an international organization dedicated to promoting the protection of civilians caught in conflict. CIVIC's mission is to work with armed actors and civilians in conflict to develop and implement solutions to prevent, mitigate, and respond to civilian harm. Our vision is a world where parties to armed conflict recognize the dignity and rights of civilians, prevent civilian harm, protect civilians caught in conflict, and amend harm.

CIVIC was established in 2003 by Marla Ruzicka, a young humanitarian who advocated on behalf of civilians affected by the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Building on her extraordinary legacy, CIVIC now operates in conflict zones throughout the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and South Asia to advance a higher standard of protection for civilians.

At CIVIC, we believe that parties to armed conflict have a responsibility to prevent and address civilian harm. To accomplish this, we assess the causes of civilian harm in particular conflicts, craft practical solutions to address that harm, and advocate the adoption of new policies and practices that lead to the improved wellbeing of civilians caught in conflict. Recognizing the power of collaboration, we engage with civilians, governments, militaries, and international and regional institutions to identify and institutionalize strengthened protections for civilians in conflict.

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RECOGNIZE. PREVENT. PROTECT. AMEND.

Cover *Man standing in front of his destroyed house in Al-Jahmaliyah neighbourhood in Taiz city, January, 2019*

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Red Crescent medics carry a body of the victims of Saudi led airstrike on a Houthi detention center in Dhamar, Yemen, September 1, 2019.

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GLOSSARY

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
AMA	Abductees Mothers Association
AOHR	Ain Organization for Human Rights
AP	Associated Press
AQAP	Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War
GEE	Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts
GPC	General People's Congress
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IHRL	International Human Rights Law
MOD	Ministry of Defense
NMAC	National Mine Action Committee
OHCHR	United Nations Human Rights Office for the High Commissioner
OSESGY	Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen
SLC	Saudi-led coalition
STC	Southern Transitional Council
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children Emergency Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States
UXO	Unexploded Ordinance
WFP	World Food Program
YEMAC	Yemen Mine Action Center
UAE	United Arab Emirates

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Civilians in Yemen have borne the brunt of armed conflict for over five years. As civilians struggle to survive, they face death, injury, homes that have been destroyed or damaged by airstrikes, shelling, sniper attacks, landmines, as well as enforced disappearances and torture. The war has also severely exacerbated economic hardship and humanitarian conditions in the country. The United Nations (UN) estimates that close to 80 percent of Yemenis in the country need assistance and protection, with two-thirds of the districts in Yemen already on the brink of famine. As of November 2019, an estimated 3.3 million people remain displaced. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) reports 100,000 people have been killed due to direct violence since 2015.¹ These do not include fatalities from indirect causes such as starvation or disease.

Limited progress has been made on the December 2018 UN-brokered Stockholm Agreement to demilitarize the port city of Hodeidah, facilitate prisoner exchanges, and draft a statement of understanding on Taiz. The agreement, which called for an immediate ceasefire in Hodeidah city, has resulted in a 68 percent decrease in the number of security incidents in the city.² Violence has, however, escalated in other parts of the country such as Taiz, Hajja, and Al-Dhalee, resulting in death, injuries, the destruction of homes, and displacement.

Violence spread across Yemen when Houthis took over Sana'a, the capital, in September 2014 with the help of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh's forces and expanded into the rest of the country. Fighting escalated when a coalition, led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), intervened militarily in March 2015 to reinstate the internationally-recognized government of President Abdrabuh Mansoor Hadi. The situation remains a political and military stalemate with dozens of active frontlines across the country. The August 2019 clashes

between pro-Hadi government forces and the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC) in the south have further complicated the conflict and put civilians at even greater risk.

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) undertook research on the patterns of civilian harm, as described by civilians, by all parties to the conflict from 2017 to 2019 in Baydha, Hodeidah, Taiz, and Shabwa governorates, as well as from previously unreported cases in Baydha, from 2014. All parties to the conflict in Yemen are responsible for extensive civilian harm and have failed to take the necessary precautions to minimize civilian harm when engaging military targets. In some cases, civilians have been deliberately targeted, forcibly disappeared, and tortured.

Both Houthi and pro-government forces have used explosive weapons with wide-area effects. They have hit homes, medical facilities, schools, and other civilian infrastructure, causing many civilians in Taiz and Hodeidah to flee, and resulting in death and injuries.

According to ACLED, the Saudi-Led Coalition (SLC) is responsible for 67 percent of civilian casualties in the country since 2015.³ A civilian from Shabwa who witnessed airstrikes in Hodeidah told CIVIC, "The airstrikes killed seven children and four women. The coalition bombed anything that moved."⁴ Civilians in the outskirts of Hodeidah city told CIVIC that they were not warned far enough in advance of offensive operations by the SLC to allow them to seek safety, resulting in death and injuries. While the SLC continues to undertake investigations of civilian casualties, the UN Group of Experts has concluded that it is unclear what remedial measures are being taken to change guidance or targeting processes to reduce civilian casualties, and found that the publicly available investigation reports have insufficient analysis.

1 Sam Jones and Mattias Sulz, "Press Release: Over 100,000 Reported Killed in Yemen War," ACLED Data, November 7, 2019, <https://www.acleddata.com/2019/10/31/press-release-over-100000-reported-killed-in-yemen-war/>

2 United Nations, United Nations Officials Urge Parties in Yemen to Fulfil Stockholm, Hodeidah Agreements, amid Security Council Calls for Opening of Aid Corridors, June 17, 2019, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13845.doc.htm>

3 Ibid.

4 CIVIC interview with civilian, Shabwa, July 4, 2018.



“The airstrikes killed seven children and four women. The coalition bombed anything that moved.”

Civilian at the site of an airstrike launched by Saudi led coalition in Sanaa, Yemen, May 16, 2019. Mohammed Yasin

Parties to the conflict, in contravention of international humanitarian law (IHL), have used civilian property including homes, hospitals, and schools for military purposes, putting civilians at greater risk. Civilians in Baydha, Shabwa, Al-Jawf, and Taiz have said that Houthis systematically stationed themselves and their artillery in and near civilian homes or infrastructure.⁵ In Taiz, armed groups affiliated with the Yemeni government used schools for military purposes.⁶ A presidential committee ordered them to evacuate these facilities in 2018, but some schools are still occupied by pro-government forces.⁷

Civilians in Taiz have reported deliberate sniper attacks against civilians coming from the Houthis-

controlled areas of Tabbat Al-Sallal hill, Sofitel hill, and Al-Jasha'ah mountain, into Taiz city, which is under the control of pro-government forces.

Civilians reported that Houthis are responsible for enforced disappearances and ill treatment of civilians in Hodeidah, Baydha, and Taiz governorates. Civilians in Shabwa governorate reported that Elite Forces — trained by the UAE — also forcibly disappeared civilians. Detainees held by Houthis, Elite Forces, and other pro-government forces were kept in secret prisons in Taiz, Hodeidah, Shabwa, Baydha, and Al-Jawf. Often, their families are not given access to information on their whereabouts for months at a time, and in some cases, up to three to four years. Detainees

5 CIVIC interviews with civilians, July-August 2018 and June 2019.

6 “Caught in the Middle: A Conflict Mapping of Taiz Governorate,” Deep Root Consulting, August 2018, http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/df2b40_e6cbadad37b248b495c4c3634996b8aa.pdf

7 “Allajnah Alri’asiyah fi Taiz tatahadath an abraz almaham allati najahat fi tanfeethaha” [Presidential Committee in Taiz Talks about its success to accomplish its task], *Belqees*, September 16, 2018, <https://www.belqees.net/yemen/لجنة رئاسية في تعز تروي كيف تم إنقاذ المئات من المدنيين>

are only released when their families pay a bribe, public pressure is exerted through reporting by journalists or intervention by international or Yemeni non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or through prisoner exchanges.

Landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) have not only killed and maimed civilians, but have also prevented humanitarian organizations from reaching populations in need, left farms and wells inaccessible, and harmed civilians trying to return home. Houthis planted an estimated 500,000 landmines as they retreated from areas they formerly controlled (including Aden, Lahj, Abyan, Shabwa, Baydha, Al-Dhalee, Taiz, Mocha, Al-Khoukha, Marib, Al-Jawf, Nehm, Hodeidah, Hajja, and Saada).⁸

Deteriorating security and economic conditions have impacted women and children. Half of all displaced persons are women, 27 percent of whom are below the age of 18. Only 35 percent of maternal and newborn health services are fully functional.⁹ At least one child dies every ten minutes from preventable illnesses such as diarrhea, malnutrition, and respiratory tract infections. More than 4.7 million children struggle to access education.¹⁰ The loss of breadwinners due to the conflict has also increased the suffering of women and children, as due to cultural norms, female-headed households face considerable barriers to seek assistance or employment.

Disregard for civilian lives is consistent across Yemen. As the war drags on, civilians have begun to undertake self-protection measures to reduce their exposure to risk, such as fleeing to safer locations or barricading themselves inside their homes. In urban areas such as Taiz city, where clashes happen frequently, civilians store enough food in their homes to survive until the fighting ceases. Civilians in Hodeidah and Taiz, especially in areas where violent clashes and airstrikes take place, have limited options to protect themselves. “No matter what measures you take, they don’t help if you are close to the frontlines. If we leave, where do we go? If we stay, we are at the mercy of men with guns,” said a civilian from Taiz.¹¹

In parts of Marib, Al-Jawf, and Shabwa, the tribal system has helped to reduce risk to civilians by negotiating routes for civilians to move away from the frontlines to safe areas, declaring and enforcing neutrality in the conflict, facilitating the exchange of civilian prisoners, and securing commitments by members of tribes who fight with different conflict parties to limit fighting to the frontlines. In post-conflict areas such as Bayhan in Shabwa, tribal leaders have even negotiated and signed agreements to prevent retaliation against those who fought with the Houthis.

8 Saeed Al-Batati, “Yemen coalition defuses 300,000 Al-Houthi landmines,” *Gulf News*, May 2, 2018, <https://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/yemen/yemen-coalition-defuses-300-000-al-houthi-landmines-1.2215288>.

9 “2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview,” Relief Web, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, December 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_Yemen_HNO_FINAL.pdf

10 “Protection, Participation and Potential: Women and Girls in Yemen’s War,” Relief Web, International Rescue Committee, January 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/yemenwomenandgirlspolicybrieffinalreadyfordissemination.pdf>

11 CIVIC interview with civilian, Taiz, June 2019.

In Marib, Aden, and Al-Jawf, Yemeni NGOs are campaigning against the use of child soldiers, the use of weapons in cities, and demanding and successfully negotiating the release of 600 civilians forcibly disappeared by armed actors.¹²

The December 2018 UN-led Stockholm Agreement between the Houthis and Hadi government – which called for a ceasefire in Hodeidah governorate and for the re-deployment of forces – is still in its infancy. Talks continue between parties to the conflict, led by the UN Office of Special Envoy to the Secretary General to Yemen (OSESGY), to craft a permanent peace agreement and broker a cessation of hostilities. The November 2019 Riyadh Agreement between the STC and Hadi government to allay tensions and agree to power sharing in southern Yemen could reduce violence, but its implementation remains to be seen.

These efforts by international organizations and various governments are paramount to end civilian suffering, as are measures to mitigate the impact of the war on civilians by maintaining pressure on conflict parties to adhere to IHL. But support should also be given to strengthen community mechanisms that have arisen to reduce harm and risk to civilians. This report provides Yemeni civilian perspectives on their losses and suffering. It also calls attention to emerging local self-protection solutions that need to be supported to reduce the violence and suffering experienced by civilians while broader conflict resolution initiatives are underway.

“No matter what measures you take, they don’t help if you are close to the frontlines. If we leave, where do we go? If we stay, we are at the mercy of men with guns.”

¹² Interview with the head of Abductees Mothers Association, November 21, 2019. To learn more about the organization, see <http://www.ama-ye.org>

RECOMMENDATIONS

To all Parties to the Conflict

- Support and participate in UN-led efforts to resolve the conflict through an inclusive peace process that includes local leaders, civil society, women, and youth groups.
- Ensure adherence to IHL while conducting operations, respect ceasefire agreements initiated by the 2018 Stockholm Agreement and the 2019 Riyadh agreement, and demonstrate commitment to the implementation of both agreements.
- Cease indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, and avoid using explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas.
- Immediately cease the use of civilian property including homes, hospitals, and schools for military purposes.
- Depoliticize efforts to mitigate the impact of the conflict on civilians, including facilitating landmine clearance, the flow of humanitarian aid, and prisoner exchanges.
- Respect the neutrality of tribes and local agreements that seek to reduce risk of harm to civilians.
- Support and enhance landmine clearance operations and ensure they follow international standards of safety, and prioritize clearing civilian areas of landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXOs).
- Work with local authorities and civil society organizations to develop and operationalize an efficient and sustainable mechanism to receive civilian complaints of harm and respond to them in both active conflict and post-conflict areas.
- Prioritize post-harm assistance in government and donor programs to include financial assistance, vocational training, medical care, and trauma assistance. Ensure that post-harm assistance reflects the needs of women and girls affected by conflict and that women and civil society groups participate effectively in the design and implementation of post-harm assistance programs.

To Houthi De Facto Authorities in Sana'a

- De-escalate the conflict and unconditionally allow humanitarian access to civilians in areas under siege, such as Taiz.
 - Cease practice of enforced disappearances and end torture and ill-treatment of detainees.
 - Investigate allegations of civilian harm and violations attributed to Houthi forces and hold responsible persons accountable.
 - Cease the use of landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and fully cooperate with demining efforts. Provide accurate maps of landmines to Yemen Mine Action Center (YEMAC) for demining.
- Ensure all military and security forces adhere to international humanitarian and human rights law, and are trained to protect civilians and engage safely and constructively with civilians and communities.
 - Investigate allegations of civilian harm attributed to government forces and hold responsible persons accountable.
 - Ensure detainees are held in humane conditions where they have access to food and health care, are able to communicate with their families, and have access to fair trials according to Yemeni and international standards.

To the Saudi-Led Coalition

- Review current rules of engagement, commanders' guidance and targeting procedures to ensure adherence to IHL, and implement best practices to minimize civilian harm.
- Ensure post-harm investigations and assessments create an effective lessons-learned process that feeds into new guidance and scenario-based trainings to prevent future civilian harm. Make public the methodology for investigations, results of investigation, and remedial measures undertaken to address the harm.
- Investigate all allegations of civilian harm attributed to the SLC and its partner forces, including from international and Yemeni organizations, and make public the outcomes of these investigations and the accountability measures undertaken.
- Compensate civilians for wrongful and incidental death, injuries, and property damage.
- Investigate allegations of abuse attributed to Yemeni forces trained, funded, and advised by the SLC and stop all support for those involved in gross human rights violations. Refer cases of abuse for prosecution to Yemeni courts.

To the United Nations

- Ensure the integration of protection of civilians (POC) into confidence-building measures, processes, and agreements between conflict parties. Engage civil society, particularly in affected areas, to inform the design of the POC component of the agreement.

- Continue the thorough assessment and mapping of UXO-contaminated areas, and support existing Yemeni organizations' demining efforts. This will allow a coordinated strategy for demining, UXO clearance, and promotion of risk awareness programs in Yemen.
- Pressure the Yemeni government and the Houthis to depoliticize prisoner exchanges and issues that directly affect civilians such as humanitarian aid and landmine clearance.

To US, UK, France, and other donors to Yemen

- Condition any support, including arms sales, to the Saudi-led coalition on affirmative steps taken to adhere to IHL during operations.
- Financially support UN and local civil society efforts to undertake landmine and UXO clearance and mine-risk awareness activities.
- Consult local NGOs and tribes on how best to support local efforts on reducing violence.
- In coordination with the Government of Yemen and local authorities, support efforts to restructure and improve the professionalism of current security and military forces, especially when it comes to training on international humanitarian and human rights law, civilian protection, and civilian-military engagement.

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on field research in Yemen undertaken in July 2018 and May-June 2019. CIVIC conducted one-on-one interviews with 62 civilians, including 21 women and 41 men, as well as engaged with over 40 community and civil society leaders in group discussions. Interviews followed a qualitative approach using semi-structured interview tools.

For this report, CIVIC did not conduct detailed forensic analysis, seek additional evidence, or triangulate information about specific civilian harm incidents. Therefore, the findings and examples in this report should not be looked at from a statistical lens. Instead, CIVIC sought to understand and amplify civilians' perspectives on the conflict and security actors in Yemen, building on the critical quantitative work undertaken by ACLED and Yemen Data Project. The focus of our research was not to document individual violations of international human rights law (IHRL) or IHL, but rather to identify the main patterns of civilian harm by the parties to the conflict as told by civilians.

This report focuses on patterns of civilian harm in Taiz, Al-Jawf, Hodeidah, and Shabwa governorates between 2017 and 2018. Interviews about events that occurred in Baydha in 2014-2015 are included to show patterns of abuse by parties to the conflict that have continued through 2019.

For the security and privacy of both civilian and military interviewees, CIVIC has withheld names and identifying information throughout this report.

CIVIC faced difficulties collecting data because of access and risk to interviewees. Many civilians are reluctant to talk to INGOs, either because they do not trust them or want to put themselves at risk, and do not feel that previous research and documentation has led to improvements in their safety.

In some cases, especially in Hodeidah, civilians were particularly uncomfortable saying who was responsible for causing them harm. Local civilians in Houthi-controlled areas were hesitant to talk about the challenges they faced, for fear of prosecution, as Houthis enforce tight control over civilians and NGOs.

BACKGROUND

Conflict Context

More than five years since the war in Yemen began, the country is at a political and military stalemate. The war started on September 21, 2014, when Houthis, backed by forces loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, took control of the capital city of Sana'a. The Houthis are a Zaydi-Shia group that emerged in Saada governorate in the north in the 1990s and fought Saleh's government from 2004–2010. In the following months, the allied Houthi-Saleh forces pushed into several other parts of the country, stormed President Hadi's home, killing 11 of his bodyguards, and placed him and his cabinet under house arrest, prompting the resignation of Hadi and the entire cabinet in January 2015.¹³

In early February 2015, the Houthis dissolved the parliament and announced a "constitutional declaration," while advancing into the south and key central provinces.¹⁴ This marked the beginning of a bloody civil war and prompted foreign military intervention. On March 26, 2015, a Saudi-led coalition of ten countries launched a military campaign.¹⁵ Primarily consisting of airstrikes, the campaign's goal was to reinstate president Hadi to power and reverse the Houthi-Saleh coup.¹⁶

In December 2017, Houthis executed their former ally, Ali Abdullah Saleh. In his absence, Houthis solidified their control of the northern region of Yemen, which is home to 70 percent of the

population.¹⁷ The Yemeni government and allied forces, including UAE-backed southern forces, control about 80 percent of the land, but only 30 percent of the population resides in this area.¹⁸

During 2018, UAE-backed forces, such as the Giant Brigades, National Resistance Forces led by Saleh's nephew Tariq Saleh, and the Tihama Brigades, managed to advance toward the west coast with the goal of retaking the port city of Hodeidah. The offensive was halted due to international pressure as the international community — including humanitarian organizations, governments, and the UN — became concerned that fighting between Houthis and UAE-backed forces would destroy the critical infrastructure of the port, which serves over 70 percent of all food and humanitarian imports.¹⁹

The planned Hodeidah operation galvanized international peacebuilding efforts, culminating in the December 2018 Stockholm Agreement between the Hadi government and Houthis. This agreement called for an immediate ceasefire in Hodeidah city, a mechanism to activate prisoner exchanges, redeployment of all forces overseen by the UN, freedom of movement of civilians and goods from Hodeidah, and an agreement to discuss the situation in Taiz.²⁰ On January 16, 2019, the UN Security Council (UNSC) adopted resolution S/2019/2452, authorizing the establishment of the

13 Mohammed Ghobari and Yara Bayoumy, "How the Houthis Drove Yemen into a Political Vacuum," *Reuters*, February 11, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-hadi/how-the-houthis-drove-yemen-into-a-political-vacuum-idUSKBNOLFn.d.20150211>

14 Ahmed Al-Haj, "After Takeover, Yemen's Shiite rebels Criticized Over 'Coups,'" *The Associated Press*, February 8, 2015, <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/associated-press/2015/02/after-takeover-yemens-shiite-rebels-criticized-over-coups/>

15 The coalition includes the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, Senegal, and Qatar. The level of involvement of Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Morocco, and Pakistan is unclear. The Saudi-led coalition receives logistical and intelligence support from the United States. Qatar left the coalition in mid-2017.

16 President Hadi managed to escape from Houthi captivity two weeks after he was put under house arrest and fled to the southern city of Aden. He withdrew his resignation and pronounced Aden the temporary capital of the country. By mid-March 2015, the Houthis and their ally, Saleh, had sent forces into the South and Aden, and on March 19, 2016, Yemen Air Force fighter jets—now controlled by Saleh and the Houthis—bombed the presidential palace in Aden where Hadi was staying.

17 Maggie Michael, "AP Investigation: Aid stolen as Yemen starves," *The Associated Press*, December 31, 2018 <https://www.apnews.com/c9fee661bfa64ca7adb02c037f93b09f>

18 "Permanent Mission of the Republic of Yemen to the United Nations," About I Yemen Permanent Mission to the United Nations, August 1, 2019, <https://www.un.int/yemen/about>; Maggie Michael, "AP Investigation: Aid stolen as Yemen starves," *The Associated Press*, December 31, 2018 <https://www.apnews.com/c9fee661bfa64ca7adb02c037f93b09f>

19 "Four USAID-Funded Mobile Cranes Arrive at Yemen's Largest Red Sea Port," World Food Programme, January 15, 2018, <https://www.wfp.org/news/four-usaid-funded-mobile-crane-arrive-yemens-largest-red-sea-port>

20 "Full Text of the Stockholm Agreement," Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, December 13, 2018, <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/full-text-stockholm-agreement>

United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA). The mandate of UNMHA is to lead and support the redeployment process, monitor compliance of the ceasefire in Hodeidah governorate, work with parties to assure the security of ports in Hodeidah, Saleef and Ras Isa, and coordinate UN assistance to parties to fully implement the Hodeidah Agreement.²¹

According to the OSESGY, as of June 2019, the Stockholm agreement resulted in a 68 percent decrease in the number of security incidents in Hodeidah city.²² Violence, however, escalated in other parts of the country such as Taiz, Hajja, and Al-Dhalee, resulting in death, injuries, destruction of homes, and displacement. As of October 17, 2019, there are 30 active frontlines across the country, according to the United Nations Under-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief.²³ Progress towards the implementation of the Stockholm agreement has been uneven. In a briefing to the UNSC on June 17, 2019, the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, said peace appeared to be difficult due to the parties “lack of willingness to translate their commitment into action.”²⁴ In late October 2019, some progress was made as the Yemeni government and the Houthis set up joint frontline observation posts in Hodeidah.²⁵

The situation remains shaky, however, particularly in southern Yemen. Tensions between the Yemeni government and the STC manifested in several rounds of violent clashes throughout 2017-2018.

The last round of violent clashes across Aden and several southern governorates resulted in the STC taking full control of Aden city and forcing the government out in mid-August 2019.²⁶ A mediation effort by Saudi Arabia resulted in the signing of the Riyadh Agreement between the Yemeni government and the STC on November 5, 2019. The agreement involves restructuring of the current political, security, and military arrangement, disarmament of STC-loyal forces in Aden, demilitarization of the city over a three-month period, and the reinstatement the Yemeni government in Aden.²⁷ Although the Prime Minister and other key ministers returned to Aden in mid-November, the implementation of the agreement is behind schedule. For example, the agreement states that a government of 24 ministers should be appointed within 30 days of signing the agreement, but as of this writing, this has not yet occurred. There have also been some back-channel negotiations between the Saudis and the Houthis, which indicate a desire by the Saudis to end their military intervention in Yemen and broker a political deal among different Yemeni political actors, including the Houthis.²⁸

Humanitarian Issues

Five years of war have turned Yemen into the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. An estimated 24 million people – close to 80 percent of the population – need assistance and protection. As of November 2019, an estimated 3.3 million people remain displaced, up from 2.2 million last year.²⁹

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- 21 “UNMHA, Hudaydah Agreement | Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs,” United Nations, United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement, January 16, 2019, <https://dppa.un.org/en/mission/unmha-hudaydah-agreement>
 - 22 United Nations, United Nations Officials Urge Parties in Yemen to Fulfil Stockholm, Hodeidah Agreements, amid Security Council Calls for Opening of Aid Corridors, June 17, 2019, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13845.doc.htm>
 - 23 “Briefing to the Security Council on the Humanitarian Situation in Yemen,” Relief Web, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, July 18, 2019, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ERC_USG_Mark_Lowcock_Statement_to_the_SecCo_on_Yemen_-_18July2019_-_as_delivered.pdf
 - 24 “Amid ‘Positive Indications’, Warring Parties in Yemen Must Stop Hostilities, Restart Talks to End World’s Worst Humanitarian Crisis, Special Envoy Tells Security Council | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases,” United Nations. United Nations Press, October 17, 2019, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13990.doc.htm>
 - 25 Lisa Barrington, “Yemeni Warring Parties Set up Joint Ceasefire Observation Posts in Hodeidah Port,” *Reuters*, October 23, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-hodeidah/yemeni-warring-parties-set-up-joint-ceasefire-observation-posts-in-hodeidah-port-idUSKBN1X20YH>
 - 26 Faith Salama, “New Twist in Yemen conflict as STC takes over Aden,” *The Arab Weekly*, August 17, 2019, <https://the arabweekly.com/new-twist-yemen-conflict-stc-takes-over-aden>
 - 27 Ibrahim Jalal, “Despite the hurdles, an opportunity for de-escalation in Yemen,” Middle East Institute, November 8, 2019, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/despite-hurdles-opportunity-de-escalation-yemen>
 - 28 “Saudi Arabia holds talks with Houthis to deescalate Yemen war,” *Middle East Monitor*, October 14, 2019, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20191014-saudi-arabia-holds-talks-with-houthis-to-deescalate-yemen-war/>
 - 29 “Humanitarian Needs Overview: Yemen,” Relief Web, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Yemen, December 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_Yemen_HNO_FINAL.pdf

According to ACLED, over 100,000 people have been killed since 2015, including 12,000 civilians who were deliberately attacked.³⁰ Fatality rates varied significantly across multiple governorates between the last quarter of 2018 and third quarter of 2019. Targeted violence against civilians is concentrated in Al-Dhalee, Hodeidah, Hajja, and Taiz governorates, where more than half of all reported casualties have taken place. In Al-Dhalee, where fierce clashes followed the Houthis' attempt to retake the governorate in May 2019, civilian casualties tripled compared to 2018.³¹

Attacks on water infrastructure and food production systems,³² as well as blockades of food imports,³³ blockades of humanitarian aid,³⁴ and a thriving war economy,³⁵ have left Yemen at the brink of a nationwide famine. According to the UN, an estimated 80 percent of the population requires some form of humanitarian or protection assistance, including 14.3 million people in acute need. The number of people in need increased by 27 percent from last year. Over

65 percent of all districts in Yemen are already facing pre-famine conditions.³⁶ Alarmingly, in May 2019, World Food Program (WFP) revealed that some of the food aid that had been delivered in Yemen had been stolen by Houthis.³⁷ As a result, WFP began a partial suspension of food aid to Sana'a on June 20, 2019.³⁸ After two months of negotiations with the Houthis, WFP resumed its operations on August 21, 2019. The WFP introduced biometric registration processes for the 9 million people to whom it provides in Houthi controlled areas.³⁹

The conflict has set human development back by two decades in a country that already had high rates of poverty.⁴⁰ Furthermore, indirect deaths (caused by lack of access to food, health care, and infrastructure) are predicted to be five times greater than deaths directly linked to the conflict, mostly among infants and children. If the conflict persists as predicted, an estimated 1.5 million people will die by 2030.⁴¹

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- 30 Sam Jones and Mattias Sulz, "Press Release: Over 100,000 Reported Killed in Yemen War," The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, November, 7, 2019, <https://www.acleddata.com/2019/10/31/press-release-over-100000-reported-killed-in-yemen-war/>
 - 31 Ibid.
 - 32 Martha Mundy, "The Strategies of the Coalition in the Yemen War: Aerial Bombardment and Food War," World Peace Foundation, October 9, 2019, <https://sites.tufts.edu/wpf/files/2018/10/Strategies-of-Coalition-in-Yemen-War-Final-20181005-1.pdf>
 - 33 "Yemen: Market Watch Report," World Food Program, October 2018, <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000101141/download/>
 - 34 "Yemen: Market Watch Report," World Food Program, October 2018, <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000101141/download/>
 - 35 Peter Salisbury, "Yemen and the Business of War," *The World Today*, London 73, no. 4 (September 2017): 28–30.
 - 36 "Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019," Relief Web, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, December 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_Yemen_HNO_FINAL.pdf
 - 37 Sam Kiley, Sarah El Sirgany and Brice Lainé, "CNN expresses systematic abuse of aid in Yemen," *CNN*, May 20, 2019, https://edition.cnn.com/2019/05/20/middleeast/yemen-houthi-aid-investigation-kiley/index.html?utm_term=link&utm_content=2019-05-20T11%3A12%3A08&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twCNNi
 - 38 "Yemen Food Programme begins partial suspension of aid in Yemen," World Food Program, June 20, 2019, <https://www.wfp.org/news/world-food-programme-begins-partial-suspension-aid-yemen>
 - 39 "WFP resumes food distribution in Yemen's Sanaa after deal with Houthis," *Reuters*, August 21, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-aid/wfp-resumes-food-distribution-in-yemens-sanaa-after-deal-with-houthis-idUSKCN1VB22H>
 - 40 "Conflict: Yemen has already lost two decades of Human Development," United Nations Development Programme, April 23, 2019, <http://www.ye.undp.org/content/yemen/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2019/human-development-already-reversed-by-21-years-in-yemen.html>
 - 41 Jonathan D. Moyer, David Bohl, Taylor Hanna, Brendan Mapes, Mickey Rafa, "Assessing the Impact of War on Development in Yemen," United Nations Development Programme Yemen April 23, 2019, 2019 <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/yemen/General/Docs/ImpactOfWarOnDevelopmentInYemen.pdf>

Key Players

The Government of Yemen (led by President Hadi): The government currently operates mainly in Riyadh, after being pushed out of Aden in August 2019. Since March 2015, the government has been unable to establish a sustained presence in Yemen and decisions are largely made in Riyadh.

The Houthis: Houthis are a Zaydi-Shia rebel group who took control of the capital city of Sanaa and overthrew the government in September 2014. Houthis solidified their control over north Yemen in December 2017. In addition to the capital city of Sana'a, Houthis control the north and west regions of Yemen, where roughly 70 percent of the population lives.

UAE-backed forces: These include the southern forces such as the Elite Forces and Security Belt forces. They also include forces on the west coast such as the Giant Brigades, the Tihama Resistance, and National Resistance Forces.

The Southern Transitional Council (STC): A political body that is demanding the secession of the south of the country from Yemen and is backed by the UAE. Its 26 members include former governors of five southern governorates and two government ministers. Declared on May 11, 2017, the council is headed by the former Governor of Aden, who serves as its president, with the former Minister of State serving as vice-president.⁴²

*IDP brother and sister playing on
truck tire in Al-Jarrahi IDP camp
south of Hodeidah - August, 2017*

Abduljabbar Ali Saleh





PATTERNS OF CIVILIAN HARM

Civilian harm patterns, as described by civilians in this report, include death, injuries, destruction of property, forced disappearances, forced displacement from shelling, airstrikes, and sniper attacks.

All parties to the conflict in Yemen are responsible for civilian harm and have failed to take necessary precautionary measures to minimize civilian harm when engaging military targets. Indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, and breaches of IHL, are widespread.

Coalition Airstrikes

Airstrikes by the SLC in Yemen continue to cause civilian casualties. According to a recent report by the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts (UN Group of Experts), civilian harm created by airstrikes remains “consistent and significant.”⁴³ According to ACLED, the SLC is responsible for 67 percent of civilian casualties in the country since 2015.⁴⁴ The Yemen Data Project, a website that tracks civilian casualties caused by coalition airstrikes, recorded 18,331 civilian casualties resulting from 20,190 coalition airstrikes between March 2015 and September 2019.⁴⁵ March 2019 was described as the deadliest month of the year, as 44 civilians were killed, 19 of whom were children. A further 56 civilians were injured in air raids, including nine women and 14 children.⁴⁶ In May 2019, intense airstrikes in Sana’a killed several civilians, including five children, and left dozens of others, including 16 children, injured.⁴⁷ On August 31, 2019, the SLC hit a Houthi detention center in Dhamar governorate, killing at least 96 detainees, including seven children.⁴⁸

CIVIC spoke to several civilians who were impacted by air strikes in Hodeidah, Shabwa, and Taiz.

Coalition airstrikes led to civilian deaths and injuries, and struck schools, health facilities, water tanks, and bridges. Civilians were able to identify that the harm was caused by airstrikes by recognizing the sound of the fighter jets.⁴⁹ The Houthis do not have fixed wing or rotary aircraft, and therefore could not be responsible for the harm caused by the airstrikes.

A 23-year-old farmer from Bayhan, Shabwa explained how he witnessed a family killed by airstrikes on December 19, 2017. The pick-up truck of 45-year-old Ali Al-Sawadi was hit at 4:00 pm while he and his family were trying to escape from the fighting. One missile hit the truck and another hit their house. “The airstrikes killed seven children and four women. Parts of children’s bodies were scattered everywhere. The coalition bombed anything that moved.”⁵⁰

In Al-Rakab village, Taiz governorate, Mohammed Noman, 35, lost his wife and two of his children when an airstrike hit their home on March 3, 2018. His two surviving children, who were three and one and a half years old at the time, survived with serious injuries. “I saw my wife’s body scattered and mixed with her clothes. The only parts that were recognizable were her feet and the back of her head. My other two children’s bodies were totally burned, like charcoal,” Noman recounted. Noman mentioned that he saw a local hospital in the area completely destroyed by an airstrike and that Houthis, who controlled the village at the time of the airstrike, were using it as a military post.⁵¹

43 “Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014: Report of the as submitted to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,” Relief Web, Human Rights Council, August 09, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/situation-human-rights-yemen-including-violations-and-abuses-september-2014-report>

44 “Press Release: Over 100,000 reported Killed in Yemen War,” The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, October 31, 2019, <https://www.acleddata.com/2019/10/31/press-release-over-100000-reported-killed-in-yemen-war/>

45 “Yemen Data Project Air Raids Summary September 2019,” Yemen Data Project, October 2019, <https://us16.campaign-archive.com/?u=1912a1b11cab332fa977d3a6a&id=935caf20c9>

46 “Yemen Data Project Air Raid Summary for March 2019,” Yemen Data Project, April 2019, <https://mailchi.mp/260be8f083d9/april2019-yemen-data-project-update-501127>

47 “Several Children among the killed and injured by strikes in Sanaa,” Relief Web, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, May 16, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/several-children-among-killed-and-injured-strikes-sana-enar>

48 “Detainees Stuck Between the Darkness of Prisons and Death coming from the Sky,” Mwatana for Human Rights, November 19, 2019, <https://mwatana.org/en/between-the-darkness-and-death/>

49 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Taiz, Hodeidah, Al-Jawf, Baydha, and Shabwa, July-August 2018 and June 2019.

50 CIVIC interviews with civilian, Shabwa, July 4, 2018.

51 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Taiz, July 2018.

On March 20, 2018, a coalition airstrike hit a home in Al-Motoon in Al-Jawf governorate, killing a couple and injuring their two children. One of the children was left with a permanent disability as a result. Their home was also destroyed and a large number of their livestock were killed.⁵² On May 25, 2019, an airstrike targeted a gas station in Mawyah, Taiz, killing 12 civilians including seven children,⁵³ and on June 28, 2019, a coalition airstrike hit a home in Demnat Khadeer, in Taiz, killing six civilians from the same family, including three children.⁵⁴

In the coastal province of Hodeidah, dozens of families fled their villages as fighting intensified, as UAE-backed forces attempted to retake the city from the Houthis. Displaced persons told CIVIC that they fled because of warnings from both UAE-backed forces and from Houthi fighters. The UAE-backed forces told them to leave because the coalition was going to “clear the areas from the air,” while Houthi fighters forced civilians to leave so they could use civilian homes for cover. Two civilians in Al-Hawak village in Hodeidah told CIVIC that both the coalition and Houthis did not give them enough advanced warning to leave their homes prior to the offensive. “They wanted us to leave right at that moment,” said a civilian CIVIC interviewed.⁵⁵ “We didn’t even have the time to grab our IDs,” said another.⁵⁶

Eyewitnesses told CIVIC that they saw bodies of civilians, as well as those of Houthi fighters, on farms and in villages between Al-Jah and Al-Husayniyah. According to these civilians, Apache helicopters fired at Houthi targets on farms, but through thick palm trees, which made it difficult for them to distinguish between fighters and civilians.⁵⁷

A man who was displaced from Hais district in Hodeida described what he saw when he and his family moved to Al-Saleh in Hodeidah city, seeking refuge from the raging war:

I fled from Hais to Al-Saleh district in Hodeidah city with my family. We’d been in this building with others for two weeks when, on April 2, 2018, a coalition airstrike hit the third floor. I ran out with my wife and seven children. I asked them to drop to the floor but my two sons panicked and ran with the neighbors towards a car. Others were also running towards that car. A second airstrike hit the car killing 16 people, including 12 children. I couldn’t find my son’s body until the following day and I could only find parts of it.⁵⁸

A local community leader in Hodeidah interviewed by CIVIC said that shrapnel from air strikes rendered more than 26 schools non-functional.⁵⁹

52 CIVIC interview with civilians, Al-Jawf, June 2019.

53 “Yemen Update: UNICEF chief condemns attack in Taiz that claims lives of seven children,” *UNICEF News*, May 27, 2019, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/05/1039201>

54 CIVIC researcher documented the two cases in May and June 2019.

55 CIVIC interview with civilians, Hodeidah, July 2018

56 CIVIC interview with a civilian, Hodeidah, July 2018.

57 “CIVIC Statement: Parties to the Conflict in Yemen Should Take Immediate Steps to Prevent Harm to Civilians,” Center for Civilians in Conflict, June 13, 2018, <https://civiliansinconflict.org/press-releases/statement-to-parties-to-conflict-in-yemen/>

58 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Hodeidah, July 2018.

59 CIVIC interview with a local leader, Hodeidah, July 9, 2018.

SLC Investigations

The UN Group of Experts examined several SLC strikes such as the one in Saada governorate on August 9, 2018 that killed 50 children in a school bus; in Hodeidah between June and October 2018 that hit buses carrying civilians, including displaced persons fleeing conflict-affected areas; in Sana'a on May 16, 2019 that struck a four-story residential building, killing at least five civilians; and in Hajja governorate on March 9, 2019 that hit the home of an individual politically affiliated with the Houthis, then a nearby building and a farm where civilians had fled, resulting in at least 19 civilians killed. The Group of Experts found reasonable grounds to believe the SLC had failed to adhere to IHL in its targeting process for the attacks examined, as they “raise(d) concerns about the identification of military objectives,” and respect for the principles of proportionality and precautions in attack.⁶⁰ The Group of Experts raised concerns with the SLC in 2018 and 2019, but received “no satisfactory response” and was denied access to information on targeting processes.⁶¹

In February 2016, in response to widely reported civilian casualties, the SLC established a Joint Incident Assessment Team (JIAT) to investigate civilian casualty claims and incidents during coalition operations in Yemen. The JIAT consists of 14 members with military and legal expertise. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the Republic of Yemen, Qatar, Bahrain, and the UAE sat on JIAT when it was initially announced. The UN Group of Experts has criticized the JIAT’s insufficient IHL analysis in its public findings and for lack of transparency on its functioning, methodology, and policies⁶². When the JIAT has found mistakes, it is unclear what remedial measures have been taken to change guidance or targeting processes as civilian casualties continue. Likewise, the JIAT has not been transparent about whether and how it has held persons accountable where violations have been found, undermining the credibility of the JIAT.

60 “Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014: Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts as submitted to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,” Relief Web, Human Rights Council, August 09, 2019, pp. 5-6, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/situation-human-rights-yemen-including-violations-and-abuses-september-2014-report>

61 Ibid., p. 6.

62 Ibid., p. 15.

Clashes, Shelling of Villages and Towns

Cities and villages have been the sites of heavy shelling, especially in Taiz and Shabwa governorates. In addition to suffering deaths and injuries, civilians in Taiz and Shabwa told CIVIC that they were trapped inside their homes for days at a time when clashes intensified between the Houthis and government-backed forces.⁶³

CIVIC also spoke to civilians in Baydha, who described how they suffered as a result of shelling, heavy weapons, abductions, and bombings that destroyed their homes as Houthis took over Baydha in 2014. While these incidents happened in 2014 and 2015, they are emblematic of tactics that have through 2017-2019.

Since 2015, Al-Zouab village in Baydha has been subject to a partial, and at times, total siege by the Houthis. Houthis mobilized their forces to take control of Baydha in October 2014 using heavy weapons, such as tanks, mortars, and armored vehicles they obtained when they ousted the government from Sana'a and took control of military facilities. A community leader from Al-Zouab described some of the violations he experienced:

Houthis looted our hospital and now they are stationed in it. They bombed our school to the ground. They bombed the water well, destroyed electrical grids and phone lines. They also took over farms and used them as their own.⁶⁴

Forty-two-year-old Fatima described the time when a rocket hit her home on July 6, 2017, in Al Hama village, Shabwa governorate, which at the time was contested territory between the Yemeni government and the Houthis:

We were having tea when a missile hit our home. It killed my 17-year-old son immediately, and

massively injured my other two sons. My 15-year-old son was taken to Bayhan hospital but could not be saved. My third son had severe bleeding in his lungs and was taken to Marib hospital, along with three others who were also injured in the missile attack. Our home was completely destroyed. I lost everything I had.⁶⁵

Fatima was unable to say who was responsible for firing the rocket into her home, as it happened during an exchange of fire between Houthis and government-backed forces.⁶⁶

In two reports, the Ain Organization for Human Rights (AOHR) documented 950 violations against Al-Zouab village by the Houthis between 2014-2017, including civilian deaths, indiscriminate shelling, use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects, abductions, forced disappearances, forced displacement, and looting. Houthis have also been responsible for the destruction of farms, homes, water wells, schools, health facilities, and mosques.⁶⁷

In Taiz, Houthis and government forces fought each other without regard for civilian lives.⁶⁸ Fifty-year-old Hameed from Aba'ar village in Taiz said that, in early 2018, he and his family were trapped inside their home for approximately a month because of clashes between Houthis and government forces. During that month, they could not access medical services nor buy food, and had to rely on rainwater for drinking.⁶⁹

In Taiz city, Houthis have repeatedly launched Katyusha rockets in densely populated areas, a pattern that has resulted in civilian casualties. In their recent report, the UN Group of Experts mentioned that shelling by Houthis in and around Taiz continues to harm civilians, despite a decrease in fighting in the area in the past year.⁷⁰ On April 28, 2019, a mother and her four children were killed and two others were injured in a Houthi

63 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Taiz and Shabwa, July-August, 2018 and June 2019.

64 CIVIC interview with a local leader, May 2016.

65 CIVIC interview with civilians. Ossailan, Shabwa, July 6, 2018.

66 Ibid.

67 "800 Violations Houthis committed against one village in Al-Baydha governorate-a report," *Al-Mashhad Al-Yemeni*, March 6, 2017, <https://www.almashhad-alyemeni.com/69430>

68 CIVIC interview with civilians, Taiz, July 2018, June 2019.

69 CIVIC interview with civilians, Taiz, July 2018.

70 "Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014: Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts as submitted to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights," Relief Web, Human Rights Council, August 09, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/situation-human-rights-yemen-including-violations-and-abuses-september-2014-report>

from all sides. Abu Al-Abbas fighters then spread out into our neighborhoods. Security forces then besieged the Old City from a higher vantage point. They stationed themselves in Al-Qahira castle, on Saber mountain, in the Political Security building, Al-Da'iri road, and Al-Ikhwah hotel. Other [security] soldiers raided the old town from different sides while those in high positions gave them cover. As they advanced, they closed the doors of civilian houses from the outside, to make sure no one could leave.⁷⁷

According to a statement by 24 NGOs in Taiz, intense clashes during which “heavy and medium weapons were used,”⁷⁸ led to civilian deaths, injuries, and the destruction of civilian property.⁷⁹ A civilian told CIVIC:

Fighting in Taiz city was described by civilians as “heavy and constant, day and night.”⁷⁵ Neither security forces nor Abu Al-Abbas gave civilians advanced warning about the clashes that would ensue, depriving them of the ability to move away from the fighting.⁷⁶ A civilian described what happened:

During the first week of the clashes, Doctors without Borders (MSF) reported that a local hospital was destroyed and another was forced to close due to clashes. People, including those who were wounded, were trapped at the frontlines and unable to access health services as a result.⁸¹ A civilian from Taiz told CIVIC that many families, including his own, were trapped inside for several days because snipers were in stationed in buildings near their homes.⁸² Another civilian explained the dire conditions:

71 CIVIC interviews with local civil society leaders; “Istishhad 5 Madaniyeen Yamaniyeen fi Qasf Houthis ala Taiz [5 civilians Martyred
in Houthis shelling of Taiz], A-Emarat News, April 28, 2018, <https://www.emaratalyoum.com/politics/news/2019-04-28-11207622>

72 Incident widely reported by local civil society and human rights activists, June 30, 2019; “Majzarah Houthisyah Dhahiyatha 12
Madaniyan bainahom Atfal fi Taiz [12 civilians including children victims of a Houthis massacre in Taiz], *Alwatan News*, July 1, 2019,
<https://alwatanskynews.com/post/مذبح-الدماء-في-الريف-الذي-قتل-12-مدني-بما-في-المدن-التي-تحت-السيطرة-من-القوات-الحوثية>

73 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Taiz, July 2018.

74 CIVIC interview with a local journalist, Taiz, May 22, 2019.

75 CIVIC interviews with a civilian, Taiz, June 2019.

76 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Taiz, June 2019.

77 CIVIC interview with civilian, Taiz, June 2019.

78 Weapons used included: automatic weapons, RPGs, anti-aircraft missiles, heat-seeking missiles, mortars, and tanks.

79 Youth Transparency and Building, “Statement by Yemeni Civil Society about the Recent Surge of Violence in Taiz,” Facebook,
March 21, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/311949945568392/posts/2076682352428467/>

80 CIVIC interview with a civilian, Taiz, June 2019.

81 “People unable to access lifesaving care amid heavy fighting in Taiz,” *Medicines Sans Frontiers*, March 24, 2019, <https://www.msf.org/yemen-forty-nine-wounded-and-two-dead-after-four-days-heavy-fighting-taiz-city>

82 CIVIC interview with a civilian, Taiz, May 21, 2019.

No civilians were able to leave their homes. We were bombed [by security forces] from Al-Qahira Castle [on a hill], where they could see the entire city. Bullets never stopped, day or night. We kept our children under the staircase to protect them. We ate dry bread. We were literally under siege and were not prepared for the clashes. No one dared to leave their homes because they would be targeted by the soldiers [referring to security forces] or Abu Al-Abbas. All day and night we prayed and recited the Shahada.⁸³ We did not know if we would die from bullets or hunger.⁸⁴

In Al-Jawf, Houthis have frequently fired missiles at Al-Hazm city, the capital of the province. On July 15, 2018, Houthis fired Katyusha rockets at a wedding party in Al-Hazm, killing five women and children.⁸⁵

Destruction of Civilian Property

Using explosives to destroy the homes and personal property of opponents is a tactic that Houthis have used to subjugate civilians in areas they control, and as a form of collective punishment. According to Yemen's Human Rights Ministry, Houthis have blown up 900 homes since 2015.⁸⁶ The UN Group of Experts in their September 2019 report found "reasonable grounds to believe that the Houthis deliberately destroyed civilian homes...without apparent military necessity."⁸⁷ While the civilian stories related to CIVIC described below are from 2015, they are emblematic of the unlawful tactics used by the Houthis and corroborated as recently as 2019 by the UN Group of Experts.

In Baydha, which is currently under Houthi control, all civilians interviewed by CIVIC who were victims of violations said Houthis accused them of being

Daesh (members of ISIS in Arabic), a term Houthis commonly use to describe their opponents. In Radaa city in Baydha, a woman with five children described her experience:

In July 2015, I left the house with my son at 7 am to go to the market. When I came home, I saw armed Houthi men with their trucks around our house planting explosives. I asked them what they were doing. They responded 'We will blow it up, you and your son are Daesh.'⁸⁸ I told them that it was my home and that my son Mohamed had left. I went to complain to Sheikh Nasser Al-Rateb Al-Jaoofi, then Deputy Governor of the Houthis. I begged him to stop them. I told him, 'you know Mohammed is not Daesh.' He told me that 'my Daeshi son has to hand himself over.' I cried and begged them to stop. Then I told them to allow me to get some clothes and blankets before they blew the house up. So, I went inside with my children to grab some clothes. They told me if I didn't leave soon, they would blow the house up with us inside, so we left. I walked away with my children. We were crying. After about 200 meters we heard the explosion. I saw my house fly into the air. I dropped to the ground and cried with my children. I will never forget that day. Every time I remember what happen, I wish I died [before I saw what had happened].⁸⁹

A businessman and tribal leader from Al-Zouab village told CIVIC that in December 2015 Houthis blew up four homes that had belonged to him and his brothers, destroyed two of their water wells, and burned to the ground the gas station and two trucks that he owned. They also destroyed farms that belonged to him and

83 Shahada is an Islamic creed, a testimony declaring the oneness of God and acceptance of Mohammed as God's prophet. In the sentence, it is in reference to the last words a practicing Muslim says before they die.

84 CIVIC interview with civilian, Taiz, June, 2019.

85 "Houthis bomb a wedding with Katyusha rockets 'A horrible massacre' ", *Marib Press*, July 15, 2018 https://marebpress.net/news_details.php?lng=arabic&sid=139543

86 "Human Rights: Houthis have blown up 900 homes", *Makkah Newspaper*, March 02, 2019 <https://makkahnewspaper.com/article/1097852> لزنم-900-اورچف-نويثوحوال-ناسرإل-قوقو ح/م/الع

87 "Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014: Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts as submitted to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights," Relief Web, Human Rights Council, August 09, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/situation-human-rights-yemen-including-violations-and-abuses-september-2014-report>

88 In Baydha, which is currently under Houthi control, all civilians interviewed by CIVIC who were victims of violations said Houthis accused them of being Daesh (members of ISIS in Arabic), a term Houthis commonly use to describe their opponents. CIVIC interviews with civilians in Baydha, July-August, 2018

89 CIVIC interview with victim, Baydha, July 14, 2018.

“We left our livestock and our lives behind and walked on foot from noon to sunset. There were people walking barefoot. Our feet blistered from walking too long in the heat.”

—22-year-old Samah from Al-Hawak in Hodeidah.

Clashes intensified in Hodeidah during June 2018 and families fled rapidly, without any belongings except for the clothes on their backs.⁹² “We left our livestock and our lives behind and walked on foot from noon to sunset. There were people walking barefoot. Our feet blistered from walking too long in the heat,” said 22-year-old Samah from Al-Hawak in Hodeidah.⁹³

Many civilians were separated from their loved ones as they rushed to leave their homes. Some still have not been able to reunite with their families and do not know their whereabouts. A woman left her home in Al-Mandhar village, Hodeidah, with her daughters, but had to leave her sick and elderly husband behind. Since June 2018, she has been unable to locate him. She sent people to the house to check on her husband after the fighting stopped, but they couldn’t find him.⁹⁴

Mona, a 45-year-old woman from Harad, Hajja, fled with her seven children in 2015, but got separated from her son Abdulrahman who was 11 at that time. “It was night time. I lost my son as we ran from the fighting,” she said. CIVIC interviewed her at a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Hodeidah in July 2018. At the time, she had been looking for her son for three years. She said that she couldn’t help think the worst had happened to him. “I lose my mind thinking about him. I see him in my dreams, imprisoned,” she said.⁹⁵

his brothers, depriving them of 20 million Riyals (about USD 40,000) in monthly income.⁹⁰

Displacement

Many civilians from Hodeida, Taiz, Al-Jawf, and Shabwa fled their homes to seek shelter from the fighting. “My children and I now live in a fenced courtyard that belongs to someone else. There are goats living with us in the courtyard. The place has no rooms and no roof. It is just us and God above,” said 55-year-old Khadeeja who fled Al-Mandhar village in Hodeidah in June 2018.⁹¹

A 41-year-old male teacher from Al Hali in Hodeida described how he and his family were forced out of their home by the Houthis:

On the second day of Eid Al Fitr,⁹⁶ two armed Houthis came to my house and asked whether I own the house. I said yes. They asked me to leave. I learned afterwards that they occupied the house and as a result my house has been severely damaged. I have five children. I am living with my relatives at their house. I have no salary and I am sick. I can’t afford another house.⁹⁷

90 CIVIC Interview with local tribal leader, Al-Zouab, July 9, 2018.

91 Interview with a civilian in Hodeidah, July, 2018.

92 “CIVIC Statement: Parties to the Conflict in Yemen Should Take Immediate Steps to Prevent Harm to Civilians,” Center for Civilians in Conflict, June 13, 2018, <https://civiliansinconflict.org/press-releases/statement-to-parties-to-conflict-in-yemen/>

93 CIVIC interview with civilian, Hodeidah, July, 2018.

94 CIVIC interview with civilian, Hodeidah, July, 2018.

95 CIVIC interview with civilian, Hodeidah, July 2018.

96 Eid Al Fitr is celebrated at the end of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting.

97 CIVIC interview with civilian, Hodeidah, July 2018.

Using Civilian Property for Military Purposes

The use of civilian property including homes, hospitals, and schools for military purposes has put civilians at risk. A 41-year-old man from Al-Mandhar village in Hodeidah said two armed Houthi men forced him and his family to leave their home. He later learned the Houthis were using his home. Civilians in Baydha, Shabwa, Al-Jawf, and Taiz said that Houthis systematically stationed themselves and artillery in and near civilian homes or infrastructure.⁹⁸

In Al-Jawf, civilians told CIVIC that Houthi troops liked to station themselves in vital locations such as main power stations, public markets, and civilian neighborhoods, putting civilians at risk when SLC or pro-government forces attacked Houthis.⁹⁹ When Houthis fire at pro-government forces from civilian homes, pro-government forces respond by bombing the source of the attack, resulting in civilian harm.¹⁰⁰

In early 2018, a coalition airstrike flattened a local hospital in Al-Masnah village in Al-Ta'iziah district after Houthis started using it as a residence for their fighters.¹⁰¹ In Al-Jawf, a community leader from Al-Hazm district told CIVIC that the main girls' school, Oum Al-Moa'ameneen Aisha, was transformed into a military camp by Houthis, depriving more than 500 students of their education. After pro-government forces entered the district, it was turned into an IDP camp.¹⁰² In Al-Zouab village in Baydha, Houthis occupied the local hospital and turned it into a site for their military operations.¹⁰³

According to residents in Al-Jawf, in 2018, the Saudi-led coalition put a howitzer cannon inside the yard of the Governor's Office, endangering civilian lives. The cannon was stationed just 300 meters from the courthouse and police station, 150 meters from

the office of the Ministry of Education, and about 400 meters from residential areas and other civilian properties. Locals told CIVIC that when the cannon fired at Houthi positions in northwestern Yemen it shook the entire area. Windows in surrounding buildings shattered as a result of the pressure caused by the cannon fire. At the time of writing this report, the cannon is still there.¹⁰⁴

During the fighting in Hodeidah in mid-2018, Houthis dug trenches, established defensive positions, and planted landmines in streets inside Hodeidah city, putting civilians at risk. This also led to the destruction of water pipelines, depriving locals of a water supply for extended periods of time.¹⁰⁵ In November 2018, as pro-government forces pushed into Hodeidah, Houthi fighters took up positions on top of a hospital roof, putting civilians inside the hospital at risk.¹⁰⁶

In Bayhan, Shabwa, a 58-year-old woman described how Houthis tried to use her home as pro-government forces were approaching in 2018:

We live atop a mountain. When the liberation operation started and Houthis were pressured by the government army, armed Houthi men suddenly came to our village and started taking positions on the mountain near our homes. They came knocking on our door and asked that their snipers be allowed to use our house. My son argued with them, told them the house is full of women and children, but in response they shot at him. He managed to push the barrel of the gun away and two bullets hit the wall. The marks of the bullets are still there. A third bullet landed in our car.¹⁰⁷

While Houthis resisted government forces in Bayhan, Shabwa, it became a common occurrence that

98 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Al-Jawf, Baydha, Shabwa, Taiz, July-August 2018 and June 2019.

99 CIVIC interview with border soldier, Al Hazm, Al-Jawf July 2018.

100 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Al-Jawf, July-August 2018.

101 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Taiz, July 2018.

102 CIVIC interview with a community leader, Al-Jawf, July 2018.

103 CIVIC interview with a local leader, Baydha, July 2018.

104 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Al-Jawf, August 2018; April 2019. CIVIC staff were able to view the shattered windows.

105 CIVIC interview with a local journalist, Hodeidah, May 23, 2019; CIVIC interview with civilians, Hodeidah, December 2018 and June 2019.

106 "Yemen: Houthi gunmen raid hospital as Hodeidah's civilians face imminent onslaught," Amnesty International, November 7, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/11/yemen-houthi-gunmen-raid-hospital-as-hodeidahs-civilians-face-imminent-onslaught/>; Updates from a local journalist in Hodeidah, December 2018-April 2019.

107 CIVIC interview with civilian, Shabwa, June 2018. The operation to push Houthis from Bayhan took place in late 2017.

armed Houthis would break into homes located at the tops of mountains to establish advantageous sniper positions. A woman from Raidan village in Bayhan told CIVIC that as government forces advanced in mid-2017, armed Houthis threatened her son as they sought access to the family's roof.¹⁰⁸

In Taiz, armed groups affiliated with the Yemeni government used public facilities, including schools, for military purposes.¹⁰⁹ These groups abandoned some schools after a presidential committee was deployed by the government during the fall of 2018 and forced them to evacuate these facilities, but some schools are still occupied by government forces.¹¹⁰ On November 10, 2019, students from a local school in Taiz organized a protest demanding that government troops occupying their school leave.¹¹¹

Safe School Guidelines

According to the “Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict,” “functioning schools and universities should not be used by the fighting forces of parties to armed conflict in any way in support of the military effort.” This includes schools that have been abandoned or evacuated. Although, the Safe Schools Declaration establishes an exception “in extenuating circumstances when [the security actors] are presented with no viable alternative,” the use of schools should always be temporary, and security forces should vacate the school buildings as soon as possible.¹¹²

108 CIVIC interview with civilians, Shabwa, June 2018.

109 “Caught in the Middle: A Conflict Mapping of Taiz Governorate,” Deep Root Consulting, August, 2018, http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/df2b40_e6cbdad37b248b495c4c3634996b8aa.pdf

110 “Allajnah Alri’asiyah fi Taiz tatahadath an abraz almaham allati najahat fi tanfeethaha” [Presidential Committee in Taiz Talks about its success to accomplish its task], *Belquees*, September 16, 2018, <https://www.belquees.net/yemen/الجنةالاسيائيةالتايزيةتحدثعننجاحاتالجنةالاسيائيةفيانجازها>

111 “Tollab madrasat bakatheer yomheloon mehwar Taiz esbo’an le’ikhlaa madrasathom min qouwat aljaish” [Bakatheer school students give Taiz Axes a one week ultimatum for army forces to evacuate their school], *Al-Mashhad Al-Yamani*, November 10, 2019, <https://www.almashhad-alyemeni.com/149268>

112 The Safe Schools Declaration, launched in Oslo in May 2015, attempts to tackle the broad impact of armed conflict on education, outlining a set of commitments to protection and ensure education during armed conflicts. See Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), <http://www.protectingeducation.org/safeschoolsdeclaration>

Sniper Attacks

Houthi snipers have been implicated in killing civilians, including women and children.¹¹³ Sniper attacks are widespread in Taiz, coming from the Houthi-controlled areas of Tabbat Al-Sallal hill, Sofitel hill, and Al-Jasha'ah mountain, into Taiz city, which is under the control of pro-government forces.

Fifty-year-old Hameed described how he lost his son in a sniper attack in Aba'ar village in the Taiz countryside:

On July 25, 2018, my 15-year-old son Ibrahim left in the morning to go to his English language class in Taiz city. He had just started learning English there. At the end of the class, about 10:30 am, he was coming home on a motorbike with a man from our village. While they were on the road, a Houthi sniper on Tabbat Al-Sallal shot him dead.¹¹⁴ The first bullet did not kill him, but the Houthi sniper kept shooting around him to prevent others from rescuing him. My son bled to death.¹¹⁵

The UN Group of Experts report indicated that Houthi snipers were responsible for hundreds of deaths and injuries in Aden and Taiz in 2015, and while investigating some cases of sniper attacks in 2019, it found “reasonable grounds to believe that, given the precision of the weapon” some sniper attacks on civilians were deliberate, whereas others were indiscriminate.¹¹⁶ Civilians have been targeted by snipers even when they were in their homes. A civilian in Salalah district in Taiz described how, on March 3, 2018, his three-and-a-half-year-old daughter was shot by a Houthi sniper while she was playing in their yard. He knew it was the Houthis because

the bullet came from Al-Jasha'ah mountain where Houthis were stationed, just two kilometers away from his home.¹¹⁷

Civilians from Salah and Al-Selw districts in Taiz said Houthi snipers shot at civilians to intimidate them. For example, they shot at women while they were gathering wood, fetching water from the wadi (stream), or tending to their goats. Snipers also targeted civilians on motorbikes.¹¹⁸ A civilian from Salah district described the death of her daughter, “My three-year-old daughter was injured by a sniper. The bullet penetrated her stomach. She died before we reached the hospital.”¹¹⁹

In two separate incidents that took place in Taiz city in June 2018 in Al-Modhaffar district and in July 2018 in Aba'ar village, civilians described how Houthis shot at civilians and prevented others from rescuing them by shooting at them, causing those who were shot to bleed to death.¹²⁰ In early June, a Houthi sniper killed a three-year-old child. His mother was carrying him and was about to get onto a bus when a Houthi sniper shot the child in the neck, killing him instantly.¹²¹

Landmines

It is estimated that more than 30 frontlines in Yemen have had landmines planted along them.¹²² Houthis planted an estimated 500,000 landmines as they retreated from areas they formerly controlled (including Aden, Lahj, Abyan, Shabwa, Baydha, Al-Dhalee, Taiz, Mocha, Al-Khoukha, Marib, Al-Jawf, Nehm, Hodeidah, Hajja, and Saada).¹²³ The UN Group of Experts investigated landmine cases in several governorates including Taiz and Hodeidah,

113 See Center for Civilians in Conflict, *We lived Days in Hell: Civilians Perspective on the Conflict in Yemen*, January 2017 https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2017.We-Lived-In-Hell.Report.Yemen_.MENA-Program.pdf

114 Houthis have been controlling Al-Ja'shaa Tabbat Al-Sallal, a hill that overlooks Taiz since 2015.

115 CIVIC interview with civilian, Taiz, August 2018.

116 “Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014: Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts as submitted to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,” p. 7, Relief Web, (Human Rights Council, August 09, 2019), <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/situation-human-rights-yemen-including-violations-and-abuses-september-2014-report>

117 CIVIC interview with civilian, Taiz, July 2018.

118 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Taiz, July 2018.

119 Ibid.

120 Ibid.

121 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Taiz, June 2019

122 2019 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan. Relief Web, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, February 19, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/2019-yemen-humanitarian-response-plan-january-december-2019-enar>

123 Saeed Al-Batati, “Yemen coalition defuses 300,000 Al-Houthi landmines,” *Gulf News*, May 2, 2018 <https://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/yemen/yemen-coalition-defuses-300-000-al-houthi-landmines-1.2215288>; “Yemen, Cluster Munitions Ban Policy,” *Landmine and Cluster Munitions Monitor*, August 02, 2018, <http://www.the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2018/yemen/view-all.aspx>

concluding that it “has reasonable grounds to believe that Houthis used antipersonnel and anti-vehicle mines in violation of IHL, notably in the way the mines were emplaced in unmarked locations frequented by civilians, with little to no warning given, which rendered their use indiscriminate.”¹²⁴

With support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), YEMAC, the government body responsible for coordinating mine action in Yemen, has cleared over 310,000 Explosive Remnants of War (ERW), 75,000 of which were destroyed between July 2017 and June 2018.¹²⁵ The SLC has helped to diffuse more than 300,000 landmines.¹²⁶

However, YEMAC does not have a strategic plan for mine clearance. YEMAC and its supervising body, the National Mine Action Committee (NMAC), have faced difficulties due to political polarization. As a result of the war, NMAC has split into two de facto offices, one in Sana’a under the control of Houthis and one in Aden under the control of the Yemeni government and SLC.¹²⁷ This divide, along with the absence of high-quality contamination mapping, a lack of funding, and security threats, are among the challenges that demining efforts in Yemen face.¹²⁸

Landmines and IEDs have not only killed and maimed civilians, but also have prevented

humanitarian organizations from reaching populations in need, left farms and wells inaccessible, and harmed civilians trying to return home. Landmines have been laid throughout farmland, villages, wells, roads, and even inside civilian homes. With 233 incidents involving landmines reported countrywide, the Civilian Impact Monitoring Project (CIMP) reported that landmines were the third largest cause of civilian casualties in 2018. Sixty percent of the casualties were in Hodeidah, and 69 percent of the recorded incidents impacted women and children.¹²⁹

According to ACLED, landmines and other IEDs have killed an estimated 122 civilians and wounded many others in 58 incidents recorded since 2016. The highest number of civilian fatalities was reported in the governorate of Taiz, with a total of 46 unarmed civilians reportedly killed since January 2016, followed by Hodeidah and Al-Jawf, with 23 and 16 reported fatalities, respectively.¹³⁰

In Shabwa, a civilian told CIVIC that landmines were planted in areas where only civilians would be present.¹³¹ Numerous landmines were planted on farms in Bayhan and in the desert of Ossailan. Wafa’a, a 22-year-old housewife from Bayhan, told CIVIC how she lost her brother to landmines:

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- 124 “Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014: Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts as submitted to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,” p. 7, Relief Web, Human Rights Council, August 09, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/situation-human-rights-yemen-including-violations-and-abuses-september-2014-report>
 - 125 Emergency Mine Action Project Yemen,” United Nations Development Programme, https://www.ye.undp.org/content/dam/yemen/DemDov/Docs/UNDP-YEM-Mine_Action_v5.pdf
 - 126 Saeed Al-Batati, “Yemen coalition defuses 300,000 Al-Houthi landmines,” *Gulf News*, May 2, 2018, <https://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/yemen/yemen-coalition-defuses-300-000-al-houthi-landmines-1.2215288>.
 - 127 “Yemen: Mine Action,” Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, November 12, 2018, <http://www.the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2018/yemen/mine-action.aspx>
 - 128 “UNDP Mine Action Programming: Yemen”, United Nations Development Programme, January 2016, https://mineaction.org/sites/default/files/documents/undp_yemen_one-pager_revised_jan2016.pdf
 - 129 “Civilian Impact Monitoring Report, January - December 2018, December 31, 2018,” Relief Web, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Protection Cluster, December 31, 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/civilian-impact-monitoring-report-january-december-2018>
 - 130 “The Houthis and the Use of Landmines in Yemen,” The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, June 06, 2018, <https://www.acleddata.com/2018/06/06/the-houthis-and-the-use-of-landmines-in-yemen/>.
 - 131 CIVIC interviews with civilian, Shabwa, July 2018.

I lost my brother and my sister lost her fiancé because of landmines. My brother was a fine young man. He had seven children and his wife was pregnant with twins, one of which she lost in grief.”¹³²

In December 2017 in Ossailan district, Shabwa, 15-year-old Fahd was playing outside. He came home carrying a landmine and when he sat on it, it exploded, which caused Fahd to lose his leg.¹³³

Landmines greatly restrict people’s access to their farms which are often their sole source of income and sustenance. In Al-Jawf, many farmers and owners of farm equipment stopped farming after several civilians were killed by anti-tank mines.¹³⁴ In Al-Jawf, owners of farm equipment refused to rent their machines to farmers after several machine operators were killed in landmine explosions. In Al-Jawf heavy rains also flushed landmines into Al-Hazm town, endangering civilians in the town.¹³⁵

Executions, Forced Disappearances, Torture

CIVIC spoke to 23 people who described abductions, forced disappearances, and torture of civilians in Baydha, Hodeidah, Taiz, and Shabwa by both Houthis and local forces allied with the Yemeni government or backed by the UAE. Victims were not given the chance to challenge their detention or report their mistreatment. Their families were

also denied information on their conditions and whereabouts.¹³⁶

The Houthis have forcibly disappeared civilians for months, kept them in illegal detention facilities, and used psychological and physical torture to force them to sign false confessions.¹³⁷ Numerous reports by other NGOs have documented the frequent taking of hostages by Houthis and the serious mistreatment and torture of people in their custody.¹³⁸ These abuses are not limited to Houthis. In 2019, both Human Rights Watch and the Associated Press published reports that depicted a pattern of abduction and forced disappearances in secret prisons run by the UAE in south Yemen.¹³⁹ A report by CIVIC documented similar cases in 2016.¹⁴⁰

In 2018, the UN Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen concluded that the Houthi, Yemeni, Saudi, and UAE forces were implicated in detainee-related abuses that may amount to war crimes.¹⁴¹ The same report also documented cases of torture, including rape, by the UAE-backed Shabwani Elite, Security Belt Forces, and members of some government forces in Taiz.¹⁴²

According to local activists, Houthis scaled up forced disappearances of civilians in Hodeidah city since December 2018, and in anticipation of a coalition-backed forces’ military campaign to capture the city. This pattern continued even after the Stockholm agreement was signed.¹⁴³ Some persons were targeted because they were

132 CIVIC interview, Shabwa, July 5, 2018.

133 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Shabwa, July 2018.

134 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Al-Jawf, July 2018.

135 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Al-Jawf, July 2018.

136 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Baydha, Hodeidah, Taiz, and Shabwa, July-August 2018 and May-June, 2019.

137 “Joint Statement: Stop death penalty sentences against convicts in Yemen, The Euro Mediterranean Observatory for Human Rights, Sam Organization for Rights and Liberties, and the AFD International, Euro Mediterranean Observatory for Human Rights, May 3, 2019, <https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/2860/Joint-statement:-Stop-death-penalty-sentences-against-convicts-in-Yemen>

138 Yemen: Houthi Hostage-Taking, Human Rights Watch, September 25, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/09/25/yemen-houthi-hostage-taking>; Maggie Michael, “Ex-inmates: Torture rife in prisons run by Yemen rebels,” *The Associated Press*, December 7, 2018, <https://apnews.com/e32442a4c8c24acd9d362c433d5cd10e>;

139 Maggie Michael, “Inside Yemen’s secret prisons: ‘We could hear the screams,’” *The Associated Press*, June 22, 2017 <https://apnews.com/b2a5ecfd1adb442a86df5bd05bc6599e>; “Yemen: UAE Backs Abusive Local Forces,” Human Rights Watch, June 22, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/22/yemen-uae-backs-abusive-local-forces>

140 “We lived Days in Hell.” Center for Civilians in Conflict, accessed December 1, 2019, https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2017.We-Lived-In-Hell.Report.Yemen_.MENA-Program.pdf

141 “Yemen: the United Nations Experts point to possible war crimes by parties to the conflict,” Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, August 28, 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23479>.

142 “Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014: Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts as submitted to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,” p. 7, Relief Web, Human Rights Council, August 09, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/situation-human-rights-yemen-including-violations-and-abuses-september-2014-report>

143 CIVIC interview with a local journalist and local activists, Hodeidah, May 2019.

He was targeted while he was on his way back to his shop, carrying food, including chicken and flour. The tragedy is that the victim was the breadwinner for 35 people, most of whom are children and women.

suspected of opposing the Houthis. A 36-year-old female from Hodeidah whose brother was forcibly disappeared by the Houthis in January 2017 said she knew nothing of his whereabouts, nor was her family informed about the charges against him. “Men in our family have been either forcibly disappeared [in Houthi prisons] or chased [by Houthis]. The rest of the men in my family either ran away after my brother was detained or stayed at home and laid low. Only women are left here.”¹⁴⁴

According to a local journalist in Hodeidah, Houthis snatched nine civilians and executed or tortured them to death in their custody.¹⁴⁵ On May 21, 2019, Mohammed Fitini, a civilian from Al-Duraihimi in Hodeidah, died after being tortured. He was abducted by the Houthis last April.¹⁴⁶

Similarly, UAE-backed forces are implicated in extra-judicial executions. In Hodeidah, on December 23, 2018, 22-year-old Haitham Ahmed Abkar was shot dead by a member of the UAE-backed force in Al-Duraihimi. The incident started when the soldier had lunch at a restaurant owned by the victim and refused to pay. The two men argued and the soldier shot Abkar dead.¹⁴⁷ On October 19, 2018, a member of the UAE-backed forces shot and killed qat dealer Mohammed Jebreil Ma’roof after an argument.¹⁴⁸

In Taiz, pro-government forces operate secret prisons where they hold people in arbitrary detention. The Islah party reportedly controls secret prisons in Osafira and Al-Rawdha neighborhoods. The Abu Al-Abbas faction also has secret prisons in Al-Beirein, Al-Ma’aafer area. These prisons operate outside the legal system. Local human rights activists say that dozens of civilians are being held in such facilities by local government forces in Taiz.¹⁴⁹

In Shabwa, the Shabwani Elite forces were implicated in the torture and ill treatment of detainees. A 25-year-old male from Shabwa told CIVIC that on June 3, 2018, he was detained by the Shabwani Elite Forces while he was in his shop in

144 Interview with civilian, Hodeidah, July 2018.

145 CIVIC interview with journalist Baseem Al-Jenani, Hodeidah, May 23, 2019.

146 Reported by human rights activist Abdulrahman Barman, Hodeidah, May 21, 2019.

147 “Maqtal shab ala. Yad ahad anasir almoqawamah fi alDuraihimi janoobi alhodayed,” [A young man murdered by a member of the resistance force in Al-Duraihimi, south of Hodeidah,” *Bawabati news*, December 24, 2018, <https://www.bawabatii.com/news229692.html>; also reported by Baseem Al-Jenani, a local journalist, on Dec 23, 2018.

148 Incident was recorded by journalist Baseem Al-Jenani, Hodeidah, October 19, 2018.

149 CIVIC interviews with local civil society activists, Taiz, May-June 2019.

Ataq city. He was transferred while blindfolded to Balhaf prison in Radhoom district. The trip to the prison took three hours. He then was kept there for 20 days, during which he said he was subject to torture by Yemeni and Emirati interrogators. The torture included keeping him in a dark room, exposing him to extreme heat, and threatening to beat him if he did not confess to being a member of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). He said he what worried him most was that his family did not know where he was being held.¹⁵⁰

Those who are detained are stripped of their right to complain and to seek accountability in courts. Former detainees of Shabwa Elite forces told CIVIC that they were released only after they signed a written commitment not to file a complaint or demand anything from the coalition in the future as a result of their detention.¹⁵¹

A 50-year-old civilian who was abducted by the Shabwa Elite Forces in February 2018 was blindfolded and taken to a secret prison. He was released eight days later, with signs of torture on his body. The victim told CIVIC that he was taken to a basement and beaten by two Shabwani Elite Force members with sticks and barbed wire. A third man held his legs to make sure he did not move while he was being tortured. He also said they poured a thick liquid over his back.¹⁵²

Even children have not been spared. In Nesab, Shabwa, local police detained 15-year-old Yehya Mubarak on December 18, 2018, from inside his classroom in school. They said they received reports that he had destroyed water pipes in the area. He was taken to Nesab police station, put in a dark room and beaten with barbed wire. His captors slammed his head into the wall to force him to confess.¹⁵³ In Bayhan, Shabwa, a female interviewed by CIVIC said that children were in danger of being abducted if they walked outside after dark.¹⁵⁴

Civilians commuting between Sana'a (under Houthi control) and areas under government control are at risk of ill-treatment at checkpoints. In Radaa, a checkpoint called Abu Hashim is used by travelers going to Marib, Shabwa, and Hadramout and to Saudi Arabia, where ill-treatment and abductions of civilians have been reported.¹⁵⁵

In October 2018, Houthis at this checkpoint stopped a car that had two brides from Hajja on their way to wed in Marib. Armed Houthis dragged the two women out of the car, shamed them by shaving their hair, and threatened to cut their necks if they dared go to Marib.¹⁵⁶

On July 1, 2019, Houthi men manning a checkpoint in Al-Shuraiyah shot and killed a man in front of his 15-year-old son after he refused to pay them 50,000 Riyals (USD 100).¹⁵⁷

150 CIVIC interview with civilians, Shabwa, July 2019.

151 CIVIC Interview with former detainees, Shabwa, July 2018.

152 CIVIC interview with victim, Shabwa, December 2018.

153 CIVIC interview with the head of a local human rights organization, Shabwa, December 31, 2018.

154 CIVIC interview with civilian, Shabwa, July 2018.

155 Interview with civil society leaders, Baydha, May 2019; Interviews with civilians, Baydha, April 2019; See also "Abductees sharing painful stories of crimes by Houthi Leader Abu Hashim in Radaa," *Yemen Shabab*, December 25, 2016, <https://yemenshabab.net/news/15791>

156 CIVIC interviews with civilians, May 2019; "Victims of Kidnapping tell painful stories of the crimes of Houthi leader Abu Hashem in Radaa", Al-Mashhad Al-Yemeni, December 25, 2016, <https://www.almashhad-alyemeni.com/120197> ; Twitter and Facebook posts by local activists, October, 2018.

157 CIVIC interview with victim's cousin, Marib July 1, 2019; see also "Bab Al-Falaj Checkpoint: When your Surname is a Crime," Mwatana for Human Rights, April 25, 2019, <https://mwatana.org/en/bab-al-falaj-checkpoint/>

US Drone Strikes and Raids

Civilian harm in Yemen is also attributed to the United States, whose strategy to counter AQAP is through targeted strikes. According to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, between 2009 and January 2019, US drone strikes resulted in between 174 and 225 civilian deaths in Yemen.¹⁵⁸

In May 2017, the US military conducted two raids in Yakla in Baydha and one in Al-Adhlan in Marib. The raids, allegedly coordinated with President Hadi's government and supported by US attack helicopters and aircraft, killed dozens of Yemeni civilians, according to reports.¹⁵⁹

A local council member in Baydha told CIVIC that on March 5, 2017, Yakla residents fled their homes due to drone strikes that resulted in civilian harm. That same day, he said that a drone strike targeting an alleged AQAP member in a moving car that was traveling between Yakla and Belad in Al-Jawf at about 11:00 pm resulted in the death of two children, ages 10 and 12.¹⁶⁰

On November 26, 2017, a drone strike targeted a motorcycle in Al-Ahmas area in Yakla, Baydha and reportedly killed three children. The children were transporting lunch to farmers in the wadi area. Three days earlier, a drone hit a motorcycle, killing a man and a 14-year-old child.¹⁶¹

The local council member also described a drone strike incident that he witnessed in February 2016:

*We heard the drones roaming in our area, Yakla, and then we heard a big explosion. We knew it was a strike. We moved quickly to the scene to find out that my cousin, Abdullah Ahmed Hussein Alameri's car was targeted. His body was ripped to pieces. Everyone in Qaifa knows he was a civilian and had nothing to do with any armed groups. He made a living from trade. He sold food commodities and had his own shop. He was targeted while he was on his way back to his shop, carrying food, including chicken and flour. The tragedy is that the victim was the breadwinner for 35 people, most of whom are children and women.*¹⁶²

On January 27, 2018, a drone strike targeted a car occupied by men who were on their way to Al-Musainiyah, Baydha, to bring home a 14-year-old child who had been missing and surfaced in Al-Musainiyah. All six men were killed, including the father of the child and his brother. "They were innocent men who had nothing to do with extremist groups. They worked as a driver, a teacher, a soldier, a student, and a beekeeper. They all left families behind," said a relative of the victims.¹⁶³

Family members of those killed during raids and drone strikes have not received any financial assistance from the US or the Hadi government. According to a local leader in Radaa, the Yemeni government promised to treat the victims as martyrs, which would entitle their families to monthly salaries, but that promise has not been kept.¹⁶⁴

158 "Current Statistics: Yemen," Bureau of Investigative Journalism, https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/projects/drone-war/charts?show_casualties=1&show_injuries=1&show_strikes=1&location=yemen&from=2002-1-1&to=now

159 Iona Craig, "Death in Al Ghayil: Women and Children in Yemeni Villages Recall Horror of Trump's 'Highly Successful' SEAL Raid," *The Intercept*, March 9, 2017, <https://theintercept.com/2017/03/09/women-and-children-in-yemeni-village-recall-horror-of-trumps-highly-successful-seal-raid/>; Iona Craig, "Villagers Say Yemeni Child Was Shot as He Tried to Flee Navy SEAL Raid," *The Intercept*, May 28, 2017, <https://theintercept.com/2017/05/28/villagers-say-yemeni-child-was-shot-as-he-tried-to-flee-navy-seal-raid/>

160 CIVIC interview with local council member, Baydha, July 13, 2018.

161 Ibid.

162 Ibid.

163 CIVIC interview with the relative of the victims, Shabwa, July 11, 2018.

164 CIVIC interviews with families of victims of drone strikes, Marib, Shabwa, and Al-Baydha, January 2019 and May 2019.

IMPACT ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Women and children are most affected by the conflict. Only 35 percent of maternal and newborn health services are fully functional in Yemen. About half of all IDPs are women, 27 percent of whom are below the age of 18.¹⁶⁵ Deteriorating security and economic conditions have affected women's access to health and services such as water and electricity supply. Displacement has made women and girls vulnerable to harm, especially due to lack of privacy that threatens their safety.¹⁶⁶ At least one child dies every ten minutes from preventable illnesses such as diarrhea, malnutrition, and respiratory tract infections. More than 4.7 million children struggle to access education.¹⁶⁷ Save the Children has estimated that roughly 85,000 children have died from starvation since the beginning of the war.¹⁶⁸ About 2,000 schools have been affected by the conflict as a result of damage, the presence of IDPs, or occupation by armed groups. The UN estimates that 37 schools were hit by either ground clashes or airstrikes during 2018.¹⁶⁹

According to the United Nations, assaults and abuse against women increased by 63 percent since the conflict began.¹⁷⁰ According to the UN Group of Experts 2019 report, Houthis, UAE-backed Security Belt Forces, and government-affiliated forces in Taiz sexually assaulted and raped women and children. In 2018 and 2019, Houthi fighters in Hodeidah kidnapped and detained women for periods up to eight months and blackmailed their relatives. In one case, this action forced the relative to surrender to the Houthis.¹⁷¹

Psychological trauma has been cited as having the most prominent effect on women and children, according to the women CIVIC interviewed in the three governorates. Words such as, fear, panic, and horror were used to describe how they felt.¹⁷² A 58-year-old woman from Bayhan, Shabwa, told CIVIC how landmines affected her family:

Five months ago [February 2018], I was with my daughters-in-law and grandchildren, eight of us together, just outside our home when one of my grandchildren came to us holding a piece of metal he had found while he was playing. Suddenly, it dropped to the floor and, before we knew it, it exploded. The neighbors came rushing to help us when they heard the explosion. We were unconscious. They took us to Bayhan hospital. We sustained multiple injuries. I still can't walk and my daughter-in-law has to undergo several more surgeries. After the explosion, my daughter developed anxiety. She became sick. Doctors told us that there was nothing [physiologically] wrong with her, but after being bedridden for two months, she passed away.¹⁷³

Children cry and scream in fear every time they hear the sound of airplanes, shelling, or exchanges of fire. A father in Taiz who lost his wife, two children, and his aunt in a shelling of the city said his 18-year-old daughter collected their body parts after the incident. After the shelling, she stayed in bed for two months and now wakes up crying "mother, mother!" every night.¹⁷⁴ A woman in Al-Jawf described how

165 "2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview," Relief Web, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, December 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_Yemen_HNO_FINAL.pdf

166 Ibid.

167 "Protection, Participation and Potential: Women and Girls in Yemen's War," Relief Web, International Rescue Committee, January 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/yemenwomenandgirlspolicybrieffinalreadyfordissemination.pdf>

168 "Yemen: 85,000 children Have Died From Starvation Since Start of War," Relief Web, Save the Children November 21, 2018, <https://www.savethechildren.net/article/yemen-85000-children-may-have-died-starvation-start-war>

169 "Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019," Relief Web, (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs CHA, December 2018), https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_Yemen_HNO_FINAL.pdf

170 "UNFPA Humanitarian Response in Yemen – 2017" United Nations Population Fund, October 2017, <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/unfpa-humanitarian-response-yemen-2017>

171 "Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014: Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts as submitted to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights," p. 7, Relief Web, Human Rights Council, August 09, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/situation-human-rights-yemen-including-violations-and-abuses-september-2014-report>

172 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Taiz, Shabwa, Al-Baydha, Hodeida, and Al-Jawf, July-August 2018.

173 CIVIC interviews with civilian, Shabwa, July 2018.

174 CIVIC interview with civilian, Taiz, July, 2018.



Two children standing on the rubble of their destroyed home in Thu'abat neighbourhood east of Taiz city, April, 2018

Ahmed Basha.

“I saw the fear drilling deep into my children’s souls. It is hard to ask children to hold on, to become strong. How can I explain to my children that it is not their right to play outside freely? Going outside to play can bring death. How can I tell them why their schools were closed and became military depots?”

her children scream when they hear explosions, that when she first heard them she thought they would “lose their minds.”¹⁷⁵ According to a female civil society leader in an IDP camp in Serwah, deteriorating mental health has become common among women, children, and men, as a result of the prolonged suffering they have faced due to the war and living in IDP camps with little support.¹⁷⁶

The loss of breadwinners has also increased the suffering of women and children. In particular, women in Hodeidah said that their husbands went missing or were killed and that they did not know how to continue to feed their children or where to seek help.¹⁷⁷ This hardship is exacerbated by ongoing fighting, which has denied women the ability to tend to their land, livestock, or collect wood.¹⁷⁸ Because of the need, children are sometimes forced to work under harsh conditions where they can be subjected to exploitation and abuse. A woman in Hodeidah said she had to send her 11-year-old son to work in a qat market for 100-250 Riyals (20-50 cents) a day. She indicated that she is constantly worried that her son might be beaten or harmed, but had no choice but to send him to work to feed the family.¹⁷⁹

Some women who are desperate and fail to get assistance from humanitarian organizations often turn to begging. A woman in Radaa, Baydha, said, “Life is harsh. I am forced to go out and beg. I put on an abaya, cover my whole body and face so that no one recognizes me.”¹⁸⁰ In Taiz, a male civilian said that women have less access to assistance because there are no organizations or specific agencies that women can go to and seek support.¹⁸¹

Even camps set up for displaced persons offer little reprieve. In Arrwaik camp, Marib, IDPs from Al-Jawf said that they had no clean water and no health services. They have been at the mercy of sand storms, heavy rains that have swept away their tents, and dangerous animals, such as poisonous scorpions and snakes.¹⁸²

Many children lost access to education due to the armed conflict. In March 2018, United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) estimated that half a million children have dropped out of school since the conflict began. About 2,500 schools are out of use, with two thirds damaged by attacks, and 27 percent closed.¹⁸³ In Taiz and Hodeidah, families are reluctant to send their children to school away from their villages because they fear for their lives.¹⁸⁴ In some cases, the whole family has had to move to another village so that their children could go to school safely. But this is not an option that is affordable for most. In Taiz, women said that even for those who go to school, sometimes they are unable to go for days or weeks, due to renewed fighting.¹⁸⁵

A civilian woman in Taiz summed up children’s suffering because of the war:

We women and children suffered most. Children became orphans. They are scared, hungry, sick, and displaced. I saw the fear drilling deep into my children’s souls. It is hard to ask children to hold on, to become strong. How can I explain to my children that it is not their right to play outside freely? Going outside to play can bring death. How can I tell them their schools were closed and became military depots?¹⁸⁶

175 CIVIC interview with a civilian, Al-Jawf, July 2018.

176 Interview with a female civil society leader, Serwah, April, 2019.

177 CIVIC interviews with civilian women, Hodeidah, July 2018.

178 CIVIC interview with civilian women, Taiz, July 2018.

179 CIVIC interview with a civilian woman, Hodeidah, July 2018.

180 CIVIC interview with a civilian woman, Radaa, July 2018.

181 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Taiz, July 2018.

182 CIVIC Interview with IDPs, Al-Jawf, July 2018.

183 “In Yemen, Children’s Education Devastated After Three years of Escalating Conflict,” The United Nations Children’s Fund Yemen, March 27, 2018, <https://www.unicefusa.org/press/releases/yemen-children-s-education-devastated-after-three-years-escalating-conflict/34210>

184 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Taiz and Hodeidah, July-August 2018.

185 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Taiz, July 2018.

186 CIVIC interview with civilian, Taiz, July 2018.

LOCAL PROTECTION MEASURES

As the war dragged on, and the abuses and negligence of all parties to the conflict detailed above accumulated, Yemenis took matters in their own hands and implemented a number of initiatives that reduced risk to themselves. Local communities adopted self-protection measures, while NGOs undertook awareness campaigns on protection concerns, and tribes enacted measures that led to better protection for civilians.

Self-Barricade at Home

Civilians in Taiz, Shabwa, and Al-Jawf told CIVIC they protected themselves by staying inside their homes.

“When the war came to our village unexpectedly, we only realized it had arrived when the bullets started flying over our homes. At night we sealed the windows with stones so that bullets couldn’t come in. We stayed inside our homes,” said a civilian man from Abaar village in Taiz.¹⁸⁷

In Taiz, civilians said they blocked the windows with bags full of dirt and rocks. They did so to protect those inside because Houthis sometimes shot at houses when they saw lights shining through the windows.¹⁸⁸

In villages across Taiz (Salah, Selw, Abaar) where fighting took place, families were trapped inside their homes for months as a result of the conflict. They bought flour, sugar, rice, and other basic food items and rationed them when the fighting lasted for long periods of time. They left only for absolute necessities, such as bringing in water and food or to take care of a sick relative. Civilians protected themselves by taking their livestock out to graze and travelling to neighboring villages to buy food only at night to avoid being targeted. Two civilians in Taiz said that stocking food inside the house helped them when they were trapped in the fighting and

spared them from having to take the risk of leaving the house to buy food.¹⁸⁹

NGO Advocacy on Civilian Protection

Civil society organizations are actively advocating for civilian protection. For example, Watch for Human Rights, a local civil society organization in Taiz, worked with neighborhood Akels (community-level elders supporting law enforcement functions)¹⁹⁰ to establish a complaint mechanism to report abuses by members of the armed forces in the city. Between January and March 2019, the organization organized a workshop and conducted seven focus group discussions with approximately 140 Akels to discuss patterns of civilian harm and the response by security actors to address the harm. The organization also established a hotline for civilians to report violations and harm, including land-grabbing and robbing of homes. According to the director of the organization, Akram Al-Shawafi, the hotline has received an average of 30 calls every day since March 2019. The organization has also provided legal aid to victims of abuse and their families and helped them file legal complaints to petition for the release of their relatives.¹⁹¹

The Abductees Mothers Association (AMA) has been a strong advocate against forced disappearances, torture, and illegal trials. Over the past four years, AMA pressured the Houthis, Yemeni government, SLC, and UN Envoy’s office to release abductees. Utilizing the influence of tribal community leaders and other prominent figures, AMA successfully helped obtain the release of over 600 abductees, all of whom were civilians.¹⁹² During 2018, AMA documented cases of forced disappearances and torture in 14 governorates including Taiz, Hodeidah, Baydha, Al-Jawf, and Marib and organized 64

187 CIVIC interview with a civilian, Taiz, July 2018.

188 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Taiz, July-August 2018.

189 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Taiz and Shabwa, July 2018.

190 Akels, literally means elders. The Yemeni law also recognizes Akels[as “justice enforcement officers.” According to the Law of Penal Procedures no. 13 for the year 1994, Village Akels fall under the jurisdiction of the Attorney General. Article no. 91 through 103 of the same law states the mandate of enforcement officers includes crime investigation, tracking suspects and criminals, gathering information, collecting studying evidences and complaints including searching houses, arresting suspects and criminals, and send reports to the general prosecution.

191 CIVIC interview with Akram Al-Shawafi, November 20, 2019.

192 Interview with the head of Abductees Mothers Association, November 21, 2019. To learn more about the organization, see <http://www.ama-ye.org>

rallies and sit-ins in Sana'a, Aden, Hadramout, Taiz, Hodeidah, Marib, Ibb, and elsewhere to demand the release of abductees.¹⁹³

In Marib, the women-led NGO Marib Girls Foundation, advocated to key military and security officials to end child recruitment by government forces. In March 2019, a delegation from the Marib Girls Foundation met with the Chief of Staff, Minister of Defense, head of the Moral Guidance Department at the Ministry of Defense (MOD), the Security Director and Commander of Special Forces in Marib, and the Governor of Marib. Their advocacy led the Minister of Defense to give orders to military units and the Moral Guidance Department – the MOD's main body that is responsible for educational activities for soldiers throughout the country, including on the frontlines – to implement an awareness campaign against child recruitment and report any child recruitment to the MOD. On October 22, 2018, the Military Operations and Center for Command and Control issued a directive to the head of Human Resources and Commanders of Military Regions and units ordering them to refrain from recruiting children into their units. On July 24, 2018, the Director of Security in Marib issued a directive to all security units not to accept or recruit children under the age of 18, in accordance with international law.¹⁹⁴ Notably, in May 2019, the Hadi government signed a national action plan with UNICEF to end the recruitment and use of children in the armed forces.¹⁹⁵

Tribal Mechanisms

Tribal areas in Yemen have longstanding traditions to protect their people from harm, whether from other tribes or from outside actors. The following includes some of the tribal customs that have helped mitigate the impact of the war on civilians:

Safe Routes for Civilians

Tribes play a critical role in moving civilians from areas of fighting. In the district of Serwah in Marib, an active frontline between Houthi and government forces, tribal leaders have acted swiftly to protect civilians at the first sign of fighting. They negotiated with both sides for a brief ceasefire to allow civilians in areas of fighting to flee to safety. "We succeed most of the time," a prominent tribal leader told CIVIC.¹⁹⁶

In 2016 in Bayhan city in Shabwa, the city was under siege and civilians were trapped inside, as a result of the fighting that took place between the Houthis and government forces for years. Local tribes formed a committee of five people who were not associated with the government or the Houthis. The goal of this committee was to contact the Houthis and government representatives on the frontline to evacuate civilians who were sick or in need of medical help. The committee would give information about the names of the civilians to be evacuated, car type, and plate number so that they would not be targeted.¹⁹⁷

Tribal leaders who take the initiative to negotiate ceasefires and facilitate safe evacuations for civilians usually contact influential tribal leaders on both the Houthi and government sides. These tribal leaders then pressure the leaders on both sides to accept and honor their agreements. Sheikhs then give their word on behalf of the side they represent that their side will commit to the ceasefire.¹⁹⁸

In July 2019, in Marib, civilians were trapped in clashes between security forces and local tribesmen. Ali Al-Musallal, a local community leader, had to host and take care of over 200 IDPs, mostly women and children, who fled from the fighting and came to him for a safe place to stay. After two days of providing the displaced civilians with food and shelter, Al-Musallal's family started to run out of supplies and could not re-supply because of clashes in the area. He then successfully negotiated a safe passage for

193 "When Death Becomes a Wish: Rights Report Documenting Cases of Torture in Yemen", Abductees Mothers Association, October 2018, <http://www.ama-ye.org/up/When%20death%20is%20a%20wish.pdf>

194 CIVIC interview with the head of Marib Girls Foundation, Marib, November 19, 2019.

195 "Children, Not Soldiers: Yemen Signs Action Plan to End Recruitment and Use of Children by Armed Forces", The United Nations Children's Fund, May 14, 2014, https://www.unicef.org/media/media_73490.html

196 CIVIC interview with tribal leader, Marib, September 8, 2019.

197 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Shabwa, July 2018.

198 CIVIC interview with a tribal leader, Marib, September 8, 2019

the IDPs who were relocated to IDP camps by the local authority.¹⁹⁹

Ceasefire agreements, which include prisoner exchanges, have a chance of succeeding if they are done informally through tribal leaders, as they are seen as neutral. Tribal mediation uses both pressure and the influence of tribal leaders on parties to the conflict to ensure they follow through with their commitments. “If the government or the Houthis intervene in the processes, things get politicized and that obstructs the efforts,” said a prominent tribal leader from Serwah.²⁰⁰

The same intervention has also helped civilians vulnerable to harassment while travelling through checkpoints between Houthi and government areas. For example, when civilians are travelling in a wedding convoy, tribal leaders from an area under the control of the Yemeni government communicate with influential tribal leaders in areas under Houthi control or vice versa. They then talk to officials controlling checkpoints on both sides to allow the wedding convoys to pass safely. Normally, this procedure entails giving names and information of those travelling to the officials.²⁰¹

Stay Neutral and Limit Fighting to Frontlines

Traditionally, the default mechanism for tribes to protect themselves and their communities is to stay neutral. They will not fight unless they feel they are faced with an immediate threat to their security and will try to do everything they can to prevent violence from spreading to their areas. When there are signs of potential violence, such as imminent fighting or intent from an armed actor to enter their territory or to use their land, tribal leaders immediately deploy mediators to engage with the conflict parties. The mediators then negotiate with the armed actors so that they do not bring the fighting to the tribes.

In tribal areas, public roads run through tribal territories. The tribes have the power to block

these roads or negotiate who uses these roads. They usually do this to mitigate a security threat, for example creating checkpoints to catch thieves, or to pressure the government to deliver promised developments. Normally, tribes allow any armed actor (Houthis or pro-government forces) to use the main road that runs through their tribal territory. In return, armed actors are supposed to agree not to station themselves on the tribe’s land or launch strikes on the opposing conflict party from tribal areas. In spring of 2015, when Houthis seized Ataq city, the capital of Shabwa, the tribes decided not to fight to avoid harming civilians and destroying their city. The SLC delivered weapons to the tribes to fight the Houthis, but the tribes refused to take up arms. The tribes also moved the frontline away from Ataq city and its civilians to the mountains about 20 kilometers outside the city.²⁰²

In Al-Rawdha town in Al-Jawf, the tribes decided not to intervene in the fighting or turn their land into a fighting zone. Sheikh Mohammed Al-Ajji of Al-Foqman tribe agreed with his men to not allow Houthis or government fighters to station themselves in Al-Rawdha. The tribe negotiated with both Houthis and government forces and managed to convince them to not use the tribe’s land for fighting. The tribes in Al-Jawf created several areas that are off limits to fighting, including Mo’aimerah town in Al-Motoon district.²⁰³

In certain tribal areas, members of the tribes have taken up arms on opposing sides of the conflict. These members have agreed to not show support for their side when they return home. In Al-Jawf, tribal members respect each other’s differences, and those who support the Houthis or the government even go to each other’s funerals.²⁰⁴

As a civilian woman from Al-Jawf told CIVIC, “One of my sons is fighting with the Houthis and the other with the [Hadi] government. They have breakfast

199 Mr. Al-Musallal is also a member of CIVIC’s Community Protection Groups (CPG) created in 2019, groups formed to increase their knowledge on protection of civilians’ frameworks and advocacy to engage in dialogue with security actors to address protection issues identified in their communities.

200 CIVIC interview with a tribal leader, Marib, September 8, 2019.

201 Ibid.

202 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Marib and Al-Jawf, July 2018.

203 CIVIC interviews, Marib and Al-Jawf, June-July 2018.

204 Ibid.

“One of my sons is fighting with the Houthis and the other with the [Hadi] government. They have breakfast together before they go to fight.”

government forces or directly between Houthis and local tribes. According to the AMA, about 2,000 prisoners, including civilians and fighters, have been swapped since 2015, mainly through tribal mediations.²¹²

Prisoner exchanges can be initiated by third parties, a singular party, or members from opposing sides – there is no set blueprint. The mediation process for the prisoner swap reflects the negotiation and de-escalation culture embedded in the tribal society. Tribal mediators negotiate with the parties regarding specifics of the exchange, which include the number.

society leader, Marib, Baydha and Al-Jawf, May 2017.

Marib," *Yemen Monitor*, January 19, 2017, <http://www.yemenmonitor.com>.

40- اليمنية الاماراتية - في تلبيق - ابام - 40

chers Association, October 24, 2019.

“The wounds of war motivated the tribes to sympathize more with each other.”

names, and status (e.g., injured, civilian, combatant). The mediators must shuttle between both sides, and reaching an agreement can take a long time.

Prisoner exchange is a sensitive issue and negotiations can collapse because they become politicized. Exchanges are more successful when they are negotiated informally. Sometimes conflict sides accuse sheikhs who initiate prisoner exchange negotiations of supporting the other side. “Houthis would accuse sheikhs of wanting to release Daesh [ISIS], a term Houthis used to describe their opponents, and the government would accuse them of complicity with the Houthis,” said a civil society activist from Marib involved in prison exchanges.²¹³

The UN-backed Stockholm Agreement that was signed between the Yemeni government on

December 2, 2019, inadvertently undermined these prisoner swaps. The agreement did not distinguish between civilian abductees and combatants. According to a senior member of the AMA, “Before Stockholm we successfully worked with families to release civilian prisoners through mediation or ransom. After Stockholm, Houthis tell us that these mediations are no longer accepted and prisoner release should happen according to the agreement.” Because of the Stockholm Agreement, this humanitarian issue became politicized and now is linked to the Hodeida and Taiz agreement. “When negotiations collapse, so do efforts to release prisoners,” the AMA representative added.²¹⁴

Prevent Retaliation

When government forces retook the city of Hareeb in Marib and city of Bayhan in Shabwa from the Houthis, the commander of the 26th Brigade, Mufarreh Beheibeh, who is also a prominent tribal mediator, told local tribesmen and sheikhs who sided with the Houthis that government forces would not retaliate against or target them if they stopped fighting alongside the Houthis.²¹⁵ Sheikh Beheibeh reached out to sheikhs from both sides and worked with them to negotiate an agreement whereby local leaders would refrain from fighting the government on behalf of the Houthis in exchange for amnesty. His efforts prevented potential revenge killings and violence after the Houthis were pushed out of the two cities in early 2018. Both areas are now relatively stable and safe.²¹⁶

213 CIVIC interview with civil society activist, Marib, September 2019.

214 CIVIC interview with a senior member of the Abductees Mothers Association, October 24, 2019.

215 CIVIC interview with Sheikh Mufarreh Beheibeh, Marib, August 2018.

216 CIVIC interviews with civilians, Marib and Shabwa, June-July 2018.

CONCLUSION

As the armed conflict in Yemen continues, so does civilian suffering. Attempts at brokering a permanent cessation of hostilities have yet to take hold, as parties represented in the peace talks have so far failed to follow through with their commitments to local ceasefire and de-escalation arrangements. Parties to the conflict have put in little effort to prevent civilian harm or to stop and investigate unlawful actions by their forces. With no end in sight to the conflict or change in the behavior of parties to the conflict, civilians have had to leverage existing tribal or community mechanisms to protect themselves and to hold forces accountable.

Civil society organizations are also demanding that armed actors release arbitrarily detained civilians and those who have been forcibly disappeared. In tribal areas, communities have utilized and created methods to limit the impact of the conflict on their communities. Tribes have successfully limited the presence and operations of armed actors on their land, helped facilitate prisoner exchanges, negotiated the evacuation of civilians from active

frontlines, and prevented retaliation against tribal members. However, these approaches have challenges and limitations, especially in urban areas where strong tribal mechanisms and customs do not exist.

Parties to the conflict need to commit to measures to prevent civilian harm and adhere to IHL. The UN Special Envoy to Yemen and the SLC need to integrate civilian protection into peace talks and agreements, including as a confidence-building measure, as well as into future mechanisms designed to implement these agreements. While these are critical steps to limit civilian harm, all parties need to engage local actors who are involved in the protection of civilians, including civil society groups and tribal mechanisms. Donors urgently need to recognize and support programs that strengthen civil society and community protection mechanisms. Ultimately, efforts to establish peace and policies to mitigate civilian harm can only be effective and sustainable if the affected communities take part in shaping them.

RECOGNIZE. PREVENT. PROTECT. AMEND.



Girls at IDP camp in Al-Khoukhah city, west coast, Yemen, July 2018

Mahmoud Ma'arouf.