



General Assembly

Distr.: General
6 June 2024

English only

Human Rights Council

Fifty-second session

27 February–31 March 2023

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Peace Track Initiative, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[5 February 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Houthis Increase Restrictions on Women in Areas under their De facto Control

The Peace Track Initiative (PTI) is concerned about the excessive suppression of rights and freedoms in Yemen, that disproportionately affects and targets women, specially in areas under de facto Houthi control.

The Houthis continue to commit human rights abuses and violations establishing a minority rule under religious guise and radical ideology. Peace Track Initiative received numerous complaints from women human rights defenders members of the Women Solidarity Network in relation to increased restrictions to mobility and imposing conservative dress code hindering their accessibility to basic rights and freedoms. These recent violations and abuses add up to the list of sexual and gender based violence including women arbitrary arrests, forced disappearances, torture including sexual harassment and rape, and mobilisation of Houthi women in militia formations including Alzainabiat to further suppress Yemeni women(1).

More recently, in November 2022, the Houthi group issued a code of conduct for employees, that is enforced in all de-facto state institutions in territories under their control(2). The Code of Conduct imposes the religious doctrine embraced by the Houthi group on all employees, depriving people of diversity and religious freedoms. Signing the Code of Conduct is obligatory to remain employed in the public sector. The Code of Conduct asserts that violations are considered sanctionable. The Code of Conduct uses vague terms including chastity and decency principle with a Quranic verse that explains that it means avoiding the male-female gaze. Public service employees in areas under de facto Houthi control reported that partitions have been installed in de-facto state entities. The Code of Conduct also proposes that a public service leader should provide patriarchal care for his employees further emphasizing masculine toxicity.

In January 2023, the Houthi group issued a new directive with conditions to restrict the dress code of women by shops selling the Abaya [the full-length outer garment worn by some Muslim women]. The Houthis held a meeting at the Cultural Center in Sana'a with shop owners to share the conditions to ensure Abayas are designed(3) as per the Houthis "Iman identity" [believers identity]. The conditions included ensuring full length, wide fitted plain Abayas, with no belts or ties, no openings in the abayas, the headscarf is to cover the head till the midsection of women, no colorful designs or embroidery, secured sleeves, no more short veils or veils with big opening for the eyes(4). A number of Houthi officials participated in the meeting including the de facto Governor of the capital, the de facto MoI Deputy, the de facto Director of the Secretariat's Security, and the de facto Undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture(5). Women human rights defenders countered this restriction by carrying out a social media campaign wearing traditional colorful Yemeni clothes(6). The repercussions of such a violation is yet to be monitored.

The Houthis have also imposed restrictions on women's mobility by instructing women to have "mahram", a male guardian to work, travel, or seek services. Those restrictions started with Houthi verbal directives, escalating in implementation at checkpoints and travel companies. The Houthi Supreme Council for the Management of Humanitarian Affairs (SCMCHA) issued additional directives to humanitarian agencies with the objective of ensuring that female humanitarian staff abide by these conditions.

Peace Track Initiative interviewed women who traveled from areas under de facto Houthi control to the internationally recognised areas. Peace Track Initiative found that women are being requested to get a form signed by their male guardian. The women then seek validation of the form from "Aqel Alhara", the community leader in their neighborhood, who interrogates them with questions such as "whether the women have male relatives who are fighting for the Houthis or whether they have contributed donations to the war effort?"(7). Once signed by Aqel Alhara, the women still have to go to the de-facto Ministry of Interior (MoI), which provides them with verbal instructions to head to the transportation company to travel. The procedure also allows women to obtain a written exemption, provided they meet specific requirements, in order to be allowed to travel without mahram, upon approval by the de-facto MoI Security and Police Sector(8).

These discriminative conditions limit women's mobility and imposes on them unnecessary burdens for obtaining permits to travel with or without a mahram, restricting their accessibility to services and limiting their participation opportunities in public spaces including their chances to work and get an education. It also hinders the process of releasing women arbitrarily detained or imprisoned as women are only released if there is a mahram willing to receive them under his wing(9).

These restrictions constitute a direct violation of the right to freedom of movement and freedom of thought and expression, which is protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also challenges the priority concluding observations issued by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on unrestricting mobility of women and improving humanitarian access. It is also in direct violation of the International Humanitarian Law as it limits mobility of female humanitarian workers and hinders accessibility to aid by women. These restrictions also fall within the definition of sexual and gender based violence which is listed as a crime to be sanctioned by the UN Security Council. This also contradicts the Yemeni Constitution that guarantees civilians mobility (Article 57) and freedom of thought and expression (Article 42). These restrictions as such become part of the Houthis systematic strategy to target women's rights.

The Peace Track Initiative (PTI) urges the Human Rights Council to:

- Condemn in the strongest terms the violations and abuses committed by the Houthis against women, including restrictions on their mobility, dress code, and participation in public life.
- Demand that the Houthis reverse restrictions imposed on women as part of any confidence-building measures negotiated through the ongoing mediation process.
- Urge humanitarian agencies to take decisive action against these unlawful restrictions imposed on women without making concessions to the Houthis.
- Call for the immediate and unconditional release of all women who have been arbitrarily detained, and provide support to them and their families through specialized programs, including the establishment of a remedy and reparation fund for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.
- Establish a mechanism to document and hold accountable those responsible for sexual and gender-based violence in Yemen.

(1) See for example reports produced by the Group of Eminent Experts (2017-2020), and the Panel of Experts to the UNSC Sanction Committee on Yemen.

(2) Laila Al-Thawr (2022), "Between the Lines: Understanding the Houthi Employment Code of Conduct", <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/between-lines-understanding-houthi-employment-code-conduct>

(3) Journalist Mohammed Al-Ghabari's tweet on the meeting in Sana'a:

<https://twitter.com/mohammedghobari/status/1620117702219276289?s=46&t=PqWo11ZwWQrq1n7wm8H1kg>

(4) Journalist Mohammed Al-Ghabari's tweet on the information obtained by Journalist Fatima Al-Aghbari on conditions of Abayas.

<https://twitter.com/mohammedghobari/status/1620117702219276289?s=46&t=PqWo11ZwWQrq1n7wm8H1kg>

(5) Journalist Mohammed Al-Ghabari's tweet on the meeting in Sana'a:

<https://twitter.com/mohammedghobari/status/1620117702219276289?s=46&t=PqWo11ZwWQrq1n7wm8H1kg>

(6) Future Yemen noting the social media campaign:

https://twitter.com/Yemen_YF/status/1614652692537679873?s=20

(7) As quoted by a respondent.

(8) PTI received a copy of a permission to travel without mahram signed by Houthis MoI Deputy of Security and Police Sector.

(9) Amnesty International (2023), Yemen: End the male guardianship restriction for releasing women from prisons, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/01/yemen-end-the-male-guardianship->

restriction-for-releasing-women-from-prisons/ See also the Feminist Peace Roadmap that demands unilateral actions including lifting the guardianship rules to assist in releasing women detainees.
<https://peacetrackinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/eng-feminist-peace-roadmap-draft2-1.pdf>