



General Assembly

Distr.: General
12 September 2024

English only

Human Rights Council

Fifty-seventh session

9 September–9 October 2024

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.

[12 August 2024]

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



The Situation of Hostage-Taking, Kidnapping, Arbitrary Detention, and Deprivation of Liberty by the Houthis against Women and Men Working in International and National Organizations and Civil Society in Yemen

The Peace Track Initiative (PTI), a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting peace and human rights in Yemen, with the Women Solidarity Network, a Yemen-based network of more than 200 diverse women leaders, respectfully submits this statement to the Human Rights Council (HRC) to draw urgent attention to the grave situation facing civilians under Houthi controlled areas in Yemen. The Houthis armed group has intensified its brutal crackdown on civil society and have systematically engaged in hostage-taking, kidnapping, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and the deprivation of liberty against both women and men working for international and national organizations and civil society, and staff members of the United Nations[1] and Embassies. These actions not only violate fundamental human rights and clearly violate the International Humanitarian Law (IHL).^[1]^[2]

Since the end of May 2024, the Houthis have escalated their repressive actions across Yemen, resulting in the arbitrary detention of an estimated 100 civilians, including six women[2]. At the time of arbitrary arrest, the women targeted were detained with their husbands and children. There have also been reports of the Houthis broadcasting coerced confessions[3] of current and former Embassy of the United States of America and USAID staff, falsely accusing them of spying and espionage.

Circumventing this pressure, the UN urged the Yemeni government to reverse the national economic sanctions imposed on the Houthis under the recent brokered agreement[4]. This move prevented Yemen from taking similar actions in the future and did not address the release of all those arbitrarily detained. This represents a significant setback in efforts to hold the Houthis accountable, reflecting a continued appeasement strategy. Furthermore, UN staff reported being prohibited from working remotely to avoid potential reprisals by the Houthis. Additionally, the recent prisoners' exchange peace consultations held in Oman facilitated by the UN, did not include any negotiations to mediate the release of recent civilians kidnapped, arbitrarily detained, and forcefully disappeared. It also reached concessions for conditional release of political leader Mohammed Qahtan who has been forcefully disappeared since 2015 in return of 50 Houthi fighters, which is not in line with UNSC resolution calling for immediate release without conditions.

The international community's weak response to these violations has emboldened the Houthis, increasing their arrogance and audacity against civilians, including women. Their growing sense of impunity, bolstered by improved relations with regional and international powers, who are giving them diplomatic cover, and enhanced surveillance capabilities[5], must urgently be addressed to prevent further deterioration of the human rights situation in Yemen.

Since 2020, the disbanded Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen documented in their report[6] the use of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances by the Houthis in areas under their control. The 2020 Report, verified that Houthis targeted victims of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances included humanitarian workers, human rights defenders, legal and educational professionals, and civil society representatives. The Group also recorded instances of torture, including sexual violence and other forms of ill-treatment, aimed at extracting confessions or punishing detainees. The documented methods of physical and psychological torture included prolonged suspension, electrocution, burning, severe beatings with sticks and batons, kicking, forced nudity, and rape. These abuses were reportedly widespread, particularly in secret detention facilities where women and girls were held. Torture methods also involved the removal of fingernails, beatings to the genitals with threats of sterilization, and prolonged solitary confinement. Detainees were forced to sign documents under duress, without knowing their contents. The beatings targeted the head, back, legs, feet, and genitals, aiming to cause long-term disabilities. Detainees reported being electrocuted on various parts of their bodies, including the hands, tongue, and genitals, leading to blackouts.

Psychological torture included threats to family members, threats of rape and sexual violence, mock executions, denial of access to toilets, sleep deprivation, and prolonged denial of natural light.

Local NGOs confirmed this, for example, a report[7] produced by the Mothers of Abductees association documented 19 cases of arbitrarily detained civilians who died in imprisonment, 8 of them were killed under torture, 10 deaths due to medical neglect, and one case due to natural causes.

The impact of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances is disproportionate on women[8]. The Group documented that the Houthis detained an estimated 279 women and girls[9], some as young as 14 years old according to witnesses. They were kept incommunicado and in some cases in solitary confinement. Women arbitrarily detained by the Houthis were subjected to systematic humiliation, indoctrination, and torture, including rape. Houthi facility supervisors, interrogators, and other male personnel repeatedly raped these women, often justifying their actions with terms like “purification” and “rehabilitation” for alleged immoral behavior, and citing “nikkah jihad.” These acts were often accompanied by violent beatings and threats, sometimes with the assistance of female Zainabiyat guards. The sexual violence inflicted included vaginal, anal, and oral rape, with some cases involving gang rape. This abuse, combined with isolation and humiliation, left many survivors hopeless and suicidal. Detainees were falsely accused of prostitution, immorality, supporting the coalition, inciting the so-called coalition-led “soft war,” affiliating with enemy parties, or spying. Torture methods included electrocution, burning, beatings, suspension in painful positions, threats of rape against them or their family members, forced nudity, and sexual violence such as grabbing their breasts or genitals. Photographs and videos were taken of detainees in degrading positions or while confessing to false accusations, with threats to release them to their families if they did not comply with Houthi demands. While detained, survivors were forced to attend mandatory indoctrination sessions focused on their perceived responsibilities as women and girls, as well as Houthi history and ideology.

Local NGOs also validated those findings. According to a report by the Women for Peace in Yemen[10], investigated human rights violations and abuses by the Houthis and documented information about 74 women arbitrarily detained and forcefully disappeared by the Houthis. The report confirms that there is increased use of sexual violence against the arbitrarily detained women, including rape, sexual harassment, nudity, and sexual photography, forced pregnancy and abortion, and mutilation of sexual organs. The report revealed the involvement of Houthi figures including judges and supervisors in the torture and sexual violence.

The cases of Entisar Al-Hammadi[11], an artist and model, kidnapped and arbitrarily detained since February 2021, and feminist leader Fatima Saleh Al-Arwali[12], kidnapped and arbitrarily detained and has been held incommunicado since July 2022 are but mere examples for Houthi atrocities against women.

The Peace Track Initiative (PTI) has been committed to addressing protection and gender-based violence (GBV) concerns since 2018, offering urgent support to women peacebuilders and women human rights defenders (WHRDs) facing widespread abuse and violence. Peace Track Initiative (PTI) has provided critical protection grants, assisting over 156 individual cases in Yemen and in 14 host countries, 90% of the cases were of WHRDs fleeing Houthi controlled areas and survivors of arbitrary detentions. This support included financial aid and relocation assistance, referral services to a wide range of services including digital, legal, and psychological aid, as well as, enabling six partner organizations to obtain additional security and human rights advocacy grants to support documentation of women’s rights violations. Peace Track Initiative (PTI) has also facilitated resettlement services for three at-risk WHRDs. Since the recent crackdown by Houthis, Peace Track Initiative (PTI) has supported 4 cases of women fleeing Houthi atrocities and suppression with urgent relocation services and provided them with self-referral protection services information.[13] Peace Track Initiative (PTI) also assisted two men as an exception to protect them from Houthi prosecution.

In light of these urgent concerns, we call upon the Human Rights Council to:

1. Demand the immediate and unconditional release of all detainees including women, and an end to the use of torture and sexual abuse, and obligate the Houthis to restore dignity and provide compensation to the victims, survivors, and their families.
2. Demand that Yemen the immediate ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.
3. Appoint a special rapporteur on Yemen with a detailed mandate focusing on Houthis violations and abuses.
4. Call for Yemen and UNSC to impose targeted economic sanctions on the Houthis and affiliated entities.
5. Recommend to the UNSC to refer the Houthis leadership to the International Criminal Court to end the impunity of the Houthis, including those listed in the UNSC sanction list.
6. Recommend to the UN to start a peace track focusing on arbitrarily detained and enforced disappearances of civilians and ensuring the
7. Urge member states to mobilize urgent appeals to fund civil society organizations working on protection programmes for victims, survivors and their families.

Women Solidarity Network NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

[1] <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15727.doc.htm>

[2] Requested information from official source.

[3] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/06/26/yemen-houthis-disappear-dozens-un-civil-society-staff#:~:text=Since%20late%202014%2C%20when%20Houthi,not%20alone%20in%20these%20violations.>

[4] <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/statement-office-un-special-envoy-yemen>

[5] <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/08/houthis-have-cracked-down-brutally-yemeni-civil-society-strategic-response-required>

[6] <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/GEE-Yemen/A-HRC-45-CRP.7-en.pdf> page 47-49

[7] Mothers of Abductees, Witness Memory : <https://t.co/XiaXkHk74x>

[8] Documentary of survivors https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_fVuDWNmIw

[9] <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/GEE-Yemen/A-HRC-45-CRP.7-en.pdf> page 56-58

[10] They took everything from me, <https://x.com/wosolidarityye/status/1810275692493390172?s=48>

[11] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/06/30/yemen-houthis-subject-model-unfair-trial>

[12] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/19/yemen-houthis-sentence-woman-death>

[13] <https://peacetrackinitiative.org/resources/protection-self-referral-guide-for-women-human-rights-defenders-in-yemen-and-the-diaspora/>