



Findings on Human Rights Violations against Liberty and Integrity of a Person During the Yemeni Conflict

FEBRUARY 2023

DT Institute

1500 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington VA 20009, USA
+ 1.202.800.6444

This report contains a combination of analyzed and raw data drawn from a variety of sources. Attributions of attacks made by third parties do not necessarily constitute attribution by DT Institute or its partner organizations. All findings are subject to change as new data are integrated into the analytical process and as new methods are applied to refine DT Institute's understanding of the reported incidents.

About DT Institute

DT Institute is a U.S.-based non-profit international development organization acting as both an implementer and funder. As an implementing partner, DT Institute focuses on strengthening communities and leaders, working with local organizations, and developing new and innovative approaches. In its role as funder, DT Institute supports research activities and program implementation globally in the areas of stabilization, transition, and peacebuilding.

About the Yemen Human Rights Forensics Lab

The goal of DT Institute's Yemen Human Rights Forensics Lab (YHRFL) program is to increase recognition and protection of human rights in Yemen by providing one-stop access to a comprehensive repository of digital evidence of human rights violations committed by all sides involved in the Yemeni conflict. The YHRFL program is working to collect, verify and preserve open-source digital evidence of human rights violations in cooperation with Mnemonic's Yemeni Archive project and a coalition of local civil society organizations (CSOs) in Yemen. Results of the YHRFL's analysis of this evidence in light of international human rights frameworks are summarized and presented in a series of analytical reports on themes such as the rights of journalists, the right to personal liberty and integrity, and the rights of children, as well as attacks against infrastructure objects and facilities critical to the survival of civilian population. The program also supports efforts of local CSO partners to carry out international awareness and advocacy activities aimed at promoting the use of documented evidence of human rights abuses for use in legal, reconciliation, and transitional justice and accountability processes.

Acknowledgements

DT Institute would like to recognize its partners the Abductees' Mothers Association, SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties, and Watch4HR for their valuable work documenting violations against liberty and integrity of the person, which formed the basis of this report. DT Institute would also like to thank the researchers from AMA and SAM who provided their insights and analysis directly for this report, through interviews and a survey.

List of Acronyms

AMA	Abductees' Mothers Association
CAT	UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSWC	Center for Strategic Studies Supporting Women and Children
GEE	UN Human Rights Council's Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen
ICCPR	International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
MDF	Marib Dam Foundation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SAM	SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties
STC	Southern Transitional Council
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
YHRFL	Yemen Human Rights Forensics Lab

Contents

List of Acronyms	ii
Executive Summary	1
Introduction	2
Scale and Impact of Violations against the Liberty and Integrity of a Person in Yemen	2
Thematic and Geographic Scope	3
Methodology	5
Section One: Legal Analysis	6
Arbitrary Arrest and Detention	6
Enforced Disappearance	7
Torture and other Ill-Treatment.....	8
Section Two: Violations against the Liberty and Integrity of a Person Across Yemen in Numbers	9
Section Three: Common Characteristics of Arbitrary Detention, Enforced Disappearance, and Torture in Yemen	11
Common Characteristics of Arbitrary Detentions.....	11
Case Files: Ahmed, Samer, and Mohammad.....	12
Common Characteristics of Enforced Disappearances	12
Case Files: Talal, Mumin, Dr. Mustafa.....	13
Common Characteristics of Torture and Other Ill-Treatment.....	13
Case Files: Anwar and Sonya	14
Section Four: Violations against the Liberty and Integrity of a Person in Sana'a	15
Crushing Political Dissent.....	16
Case Files: Issa, Shadi, and Feras.....	16
Politically Motivated Trials	17
Case Files: Amer and Mustafa	18
Campaign of Sexual Violence against Women and Girls	18
Case Files: Janeen.....	19
Bribery and Ransom.....	19
Case Files: Mohammad and Ahmed	19
Section Five: Violations against the Liberty and Integrity of a Person in Aden	20
Settling Political Scores	21
Case Files: Ibrahim and Abdul Qader.....	21
Widespread Sexual Abuse	22
Case Files: Ahmed and Abdullah	22
Other Methods of Torture and Ill-treatment	23
Competing Jurisdictions	23
Section Six: Violations against the Liberty and Integrity of a Person in Taiz	24
Horrible Torture at Houthi-run Saleh City Facility.....	25
Case Files: Ahmed, Hadi, and Tawfig	25
Islah-led Political Detentions in Taiz Proper	26
Case Files: Wael, Abdul Hadi, Ayoub and Akram.....	27
Section Seven: Violations against the Liberty and Integrity of a Person in Marib	28
Unlucky Travelers.....	28
Case Files: Yasseen, Sayf, and Mohammad.....	29
Prisoner Exchanges	30
Conclusion and Recommendations	30

Executive Summary

Since the war in Yemen began, conflict parties have used arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture as a means to crush potential political dissent. They have targeted a wide range of people from all backgrounds who have any perceived connection, however tenuous, to opposing conflict parties. These include civilian travelers visiting from areas controlled by military opponents, or individuals whose last name happens to be affiliated with an opposition group. Conflict parties have routinely included civilian detainees in lists of prisoners to be exchanged in prisoner exchange deals, indicating the extent to which they treat victims of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture as participants in the war, even if those victims have no relationship to any of Yemen's warring sides. During the nationwide truce that went into effect in April 2022 and that expired in October the same year, all conflict parties continued to detain, disappear, and torture civilians, as [documented](#) by Yemeni NGO Mwatana.

Many cases of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance in Yemen occur without any pretense of legality or due process. Victims are not informed why they have been arrested, are held for months or years without formal charge, and are interrogated while blindfolded during and after torture sessions. Sometimes victims and their families are made to pay to secure their release, even in cases where detaining parties have acknowledged that they arrested the wrong person due to mistaken identity. In Houthi-held Sana'a, politically controlled courts have issued death sentences against individuals charged with espionage or treason following years of arbitrary detention culminating in politically motivated trials.

The torture and ill-treatment perpetrators inflict on those detained and disappeared often result in grave, and sometimes permanent physical and psychological ailments. Perpetrators routinely withhold medical treatment and sometimes release victims of torture when they are in critical condition, only for them to die days or weeks later.

The multiplicity of actors and absence of the rule of law that characterize Yemen's conflict have complicated efforts to reign in abuses against the liberty and integrity of the person. Early on in the conflict, internal Houthi attempts to improve the treatment of detainees were dashed over opposition by the movement's hardliners. In government-held Taiz city, Aden, and Marib, Yemen's public prosecutors' attempts to control the magnitude of detention-related violations have been met by stonewalling from the armed groups responsible for the abuses. Nevertheless, the public prosecutors' efforts have resulted in occasional instances of release of some detainees and the formal charging of others. This suggests that sustained pressure on the Yemeni government can result in marginal improvements to personal liberty in areas nominally under government control. Notably, the public prosecutors' push to improve detention conditions came after repeated media reports exposing misconduct in government-run facilities. This highlights the importance of robust, independent media coverage in Yemen to shine light on abuses and spur action to redress them.

Researchers from YHRFL partner organizations Abductees' Mothers Association (AMA) and SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties, who document personal liberty and integrity violations across Yemen, have found a trend towards a general decrease in that the pace and severity of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture from the start of the war until today. The reasons for this change are complex—and in some cases unclear—and vary depending on the area in question. However, this finding indicates that positive change is possible and that there is room for Yemeni civil society stakeholders to address the glaring justice and accountability gap that characterizes the personal liberty landscape.

Introduction

Scale and Impact of Violations against the Liberty and Integrity of a Person in Yemen

Since the start of the Yemen conflict in late 2014, all main actors, including the Houthis, internationally recognized government, and Southern Transitional Council (STC), have regularly detained, disappeared, and tortured Yemenis for a variety of reasons. Perpetrators most commonly target people because of their real or perceived political opposition to the authorities in control of their area. This can include, for example, membership in an opposition political party or writing posts with political content on social media. Current and former soldiers are taken by opposing military groups. Journalists and human rights defenders are targeted for their work exposing abuses and corruption, as well as their commentary and opinion writing, on the pretext that this work serves the enemy. The flimsiest of justifications can suffice for detention, including having a name affiliated with an opposing group or traveling from an area under an opposing group's control.

Arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture have impacted all segments of the Yemeni society. Men, women, and children have disappeared into detention sites. People from diverse professional backgrounds have been taken, from students and academics to day laborers. Violations against personal liberty have touched the powerful and the powerless. [High-ranking Yemeni political figures](#) have been forcibly disappeared, including the Islahi party leader and negotiator at UN talks on Yemen Mohamad Qahtan, and the head of the General Investments Bureau in the Houthi-led government Mustafa al-Mutawakkel. On the other hand, Yemen's marginalized communities have also been singled out for detention, disappearance, and torture. These include the *muhamasheen*, an impoverished community [at the bottom of Yemen's social structure](#), and the Bahai, a persecuted religious minority, six members of which were released by the Houthis in July 2020 after [yearslong imprisonment](#) in Sana'a on the basis of their religious beliefs.

"He who enters this hall is gone; he who exits is reborn," a prison guard in the infamous Wadah hall, a nightclub-turned detention facility in Aden, [told a recent arrival](#) in 2018, as the detainee recounted it to YHRFL partner organization SAM. Detention in Yemen often results in permanent disabilities, medical ailments, and psychological trauma. SAM, Mwatana, AMA, and other Yemeni rights groups have collected and published dozens of testimonies of detainees permanently disabled and afflicted by medical maladies due to the torture and ill-treatment they endured in detention. These include cases where torturers deliberately targeted body parts that detainees had identified as weak or injured in a plea for mercy, particularly the eyes and back.

Arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture interrupt the normal course of life for victims and can permanently derail it, costing months or years of study and income. The stigma attached to detention prevents some released detainees from finding future employment. In the case of released female detainees, social stigma can lead to familial rejection or abandonment. Local Yemeni organizations have even documented cases of women detainees being [attacked or killed](#) by family members upon release to address the shame associated with detention. Violations against the liberty and integrity of a person also inflict a heavy toll on victims' families, including financial and health burdens. "Many men and women released after prolonged detention, found themselves jobless and with no income; their families having survived their detention by relying on savings, or support from relatives, or women and girls in their families taking on extra economic burdens," [reported](#) the UN Human Rights Council's Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen (GEE) in September 2020. Finally, the psychological suffering that accompanies a loved one's arbitrary detention or disappearance frequently triggers health crises in family members, a researcher with AMA told DT Institute, with heart attacks reportedly "common among mothers of the disappeared."

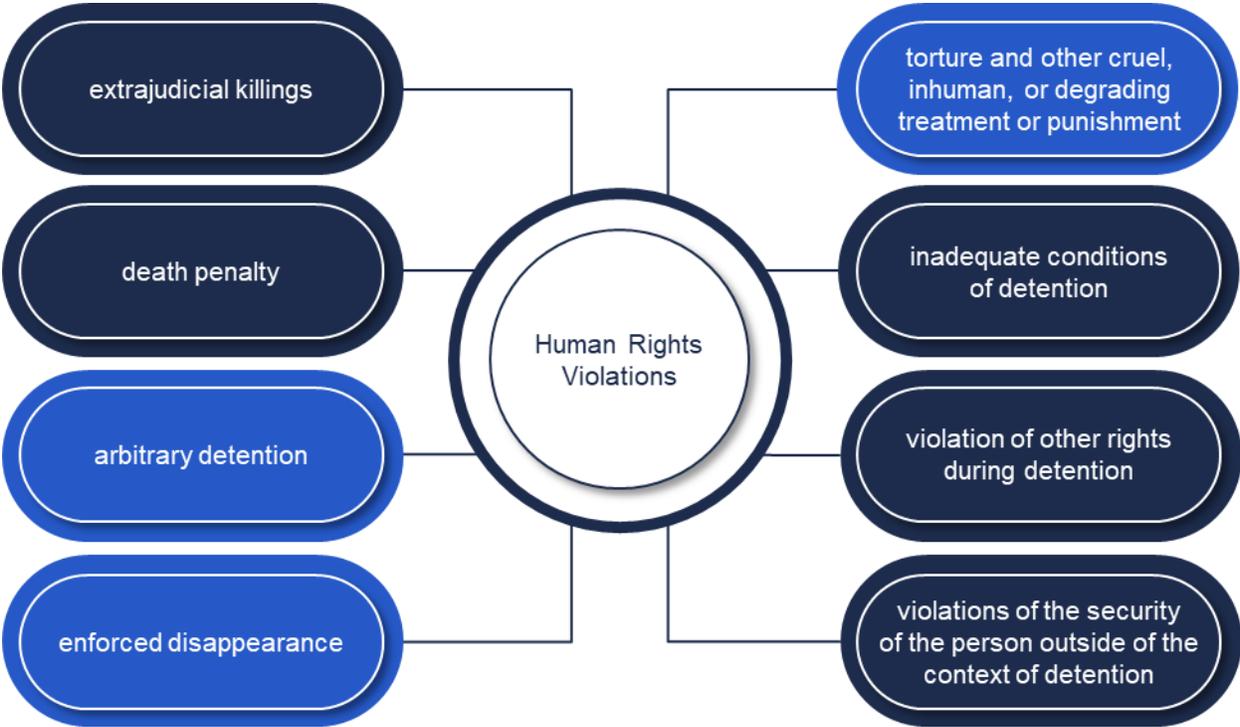
The intensity of violations against personal liberty and integrity appears lower today than at prior points in the conflict, as reflected by shorter average length of detention, better family access to detainees, and other

improvements outlined by AMA and SAM researchers. However, perpetrators have never faced accountability for the abuses they have committed upon Yemenis in detention. This means they will continue to detain, disappear, and torture, and should wider conflict conditions deteriorate – for example with the outbreak of hostilities within the anti-Houthi camp or the escalation of fighting between the Houthis and the internationally recognized government – it is likely conflict actors will ramp up their violations against personal liberties as part of their wider wartime strategies to quell opposition and dissent.

Thematic and Geographic Scope

From the perspective of international human rights law, violations of the right to life, liberty, and security of the person encompass a range of practices. These include extrajudicial killings, death penalty, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, inadequate conditions of detention, violation of other rights during detention, and violations of the security of the person outside of the context of detention. This report focuses only on arbitrary detention, forced disappearance, and torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment and punishment for two main reasons. The first reason is the overlapping nature of these violation types, as they frequently occur in tandem with, and influencing, one another. Second, YHRFL partner organizations SAM, AMA, and Watch4Human Rights have worked extensively on documenting these violations, meaning they were able to provide DT Institute with ample data on them – and underscoring the recognition for the need to thoroughly analyze this data and make it widely available to the international community.

Violations of the Right to Life, Liberty, and Security of the Person



This report provides a general summary of themes and trends related to violations against the liberty and integrity of a person in Yemen. Section 1 begins with an overview of relevant international human rights and humanitarian law norms and Yemeni laws pertaining to personal liberty. Sections 2 and 3 discuss the overall landscape of violations against personal liberty and integrity across Yemen, including numbers, major themes, and key common characteristics. The next four sections zoom in on themes related to arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture in four geographic locations: Sana'a, Aden, Taiz, and Marib. DT Institute selected these four locations because they are distributed geographically across Yemen and contain detention sites controlled by the different parties involved in the conflict. As such, an analysis of violations in these four areas provides broader insight into how the conflict's various actors approach arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture. In addition, these four locations were selected as a focus of this report because YHRFL's partner organizations could provide the most robust documentation for them. Snapshots from individual cases documented by the YHRFL partners are included throughout the report to illustrate wider themes under discussion.

Areas Covered in this Report



As with other YHRFL analytical reports, this report is not intended to be a thorough accounting of relevant human rights violations types in Yemen. Its ultimate aim is to lay the foundation for the Yemeni civil society community and international human rights stakeholders seeking to launch evidence-driven, impact-oriented advocacy campaigns to put into action a range of human rights enforcement, accountability, and redress mechanisms in an effort to move closer towards ending impunity and bringing justice to the countless Yemenis who have endured ill-treatment at the hands of the warring parties.

Methodology

The analysis and findings contained in this report rely on a mix of information provided directly to DT Institute by YHRFL partner organizations and open-source reporting, including the following sources:

- 1) **Review of evidence contained in 77 case files provided to DT Institute by YHRFL partner organizations AMA, SAM, and Watch4HR**, encompassing cases of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture over the entire course of the Yemeni conflict. The names of individuals are anonymized and the details of the cases purposefully kept vague to prevent identification of victims and any potential negative repercussions to them, except for cases that have been publicized by Yemeni or international media and human rights groups. When choosing between several potential case files to highlight in this report, DT Institute gave priority to case files that were representative of wider trends in arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture; included female victims or victims from marginalized communities; and were recent (i.e., occurring in 2022).
- 2) **Data from a survey on arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture** completed in Sana'a, Aden, Marib, and Taiz in December 2022 by 12 researchers from YHRFL partner organizations AMA and SAM.
- 3) **Insights from an unstructured interview** conducted with four AMA researchers on November 30, 2022.
- 4) **Review of open-source information on arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture** published by multiple Yemeni and international human rights organizations and news outlets. This report draws in particular on reporting from Yemeni organizations Mwatana, AMA, and SAM, international human rights NGOs Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, the Associated Press, and the GEE before its mandate was terminated in October 2021.

For each report section, DT Institute reviewed relevant data from partner organizations and open sources. Each section presents the most important findings from this review, including those taken from individual data sources and from comparing data sources with one another. In general, this report prioritized three types of findings: (1) available numbers on arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture across Yemen and in each of the four target areas; (2) themes and patterns related to each perpetrator's approach to arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture in the four target areas; and (3) themes that characterize human rights violations against the liberty and integrity of a person during the Yemeni conflict in general.

Section One:

Legal Analysis

Arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture violations highlighted in this report violate both international human rights law and international humanitarian law, as well as Yemen's own constitution and laws. Below is a breakdown of the relevant laws, treaties, and standards that apply to violations against the liberty, integrity, and security of a person.

Arbitrary Arrest and Detention

International Human Rights Law: Arbitrary arrest or detention is prohibited under International Human Rights law as per the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Yemen has ratified. The ICCPR contains various clauses on arrestees' rights that are regularly violated by Yemen's conflict parties as laid out in this report, including:

- **Article 9.2:** "Anyone who is arrested shall be informed, at the time of arrest, of the reasons for his arrest and shall be promptly informed of any charges against him."
- **Article 9.3:** "Anyone arrested or detained on a criminal charge shall be brought promptly before a judge...and shall be entitled to trial within a reasonable time or to release."
- **Article 9.4:** "Anyone who is deprived of his liberty by arrest or detention shall be entitled to take proceedings before a court, in order that that court may decide without delay on the lawfulness of his detention and order his release if the detention is not lawful."

International Humanitarian Law: [According to a legal analysis contained](#) in a September 2020 GEE report, the prohibition on "arbitrary detention" under international humanitarian law "arises from the requirement that persons taking no active part in the hostilities are entitled to be treated humanely." This requirement is specified by:

- **Geneva Conventions Additional Protocol II, Article 4.1:** "All persons who do not take a direct part or who have ceased to take part in hostilities, whether or not their liberty has been restricted, are entitled to respect for their person, honour and convictions and religious practices. They shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction. It is prohibited to order that there shall be no survivors."
- **Geneva Conventions Common Article 3:** "Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed 'hors de combat' by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria." Common article 3 prohibits various acts in reference to the above-mentioned individuals, including violence, cruel treatment, torture, humiliating and degrading treatment, and the passing of sentences "without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognized as indispensable by civilized peoples."

In addition, [the GEE analysis notes](#), citing ICRC Study on Customary International Humanitarian Law, rule 99, that "arbitrary deprivation of liberty is also prohibited by customary international humanitarian law."

Yemeni Law: Arbitrary arrest and detention violate [Article 48](#) of Yemen's constitution, which prohibits arrests and detentions not carried out under a judge or prosecutor's order. Furthermore, the constitution specifies that "the judge or Public Prosecutor shall inform the detained individual of the reason for his detention and questioning and shall enable the accused to state his defense and rebuttals," and that "in any cases, the Prosecutor is not entitled to continue detention of the accused individual more than several days except with a judicial order."

In addition, arbitrary arrest and detention violate articles 8 and 10 of Yemen's [Prison Interest Organization Law](#) 48 of 1991:

- **Article 8** specifies that no one shall be imprisoned without a signed order from a specialized judge, or by a prosecutor carrying the seal of the relevant state authority.
- **Article 10** specifies that it is only permitted to jail people who have been sentenced to jail by active judicial orders, except people accused of crimes liable to cause great societal harm, or those detained administratively by the prosecution during the investigation period, or by a specialized court during trial.

Enforced Disappearance

International Human Rights Law: Yemen is not a party to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. However, as noted in a [July 2018 report](#) from Amnesty International, this fact “does not release them [Yemen and the UAE] from the obligation not to subject anyone to enforced disappearance. Enforced disappearances include acts prohibited by peremptory norms (jus cogens) of international law, which are legally binding on all states.”

The practice of enforced disappearance violates various rights specified in the ICCPR which Yemen has ratified. These include:

- **Article 16:** “Everyone shall have the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.”
- **Article 9.1:** “Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention.”

In addition, according to a legal analysis contained in a [September 2020 GEE report](#), enforced disappearance has been described as “violating the right to life,” as well as “implicating the prohibition on torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment,” as specified in ICCPR articles 6.1 and 7.

Finally, as [noted by Amnesty International](#), “treaty bodies, human rights courts and other human rights bodies have repeatedly found that enforced disappearances violate - including during armed conflicts - the right to liberty and security of person, the right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the right to a remedy, and the right to life.”

International Humanitarian Law: [While enforced disappearance](#) is not explicitly referenced in international humanitarian law treaties, it violates the requirement of humane treatment as specified in the Geneva Conventions:

- **Geneva Conventions Additional Protocol II, Article 4.1:** “All persons who do not take a direct part or who have ceased to take part in hostilities, whether or not their liberty has been restricted, are entitled to respect for their person, honour and convictions and religious practices. They shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction. It is prohibited to order that there shall be no survivors.”
- **Geneva Conventions Common Article 3:** “Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed ' hors de combat ' by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria.” Common article 3 prohibits various acts in reference to the above-mentioned individuals, including violence, cruel treatment, torture, humiliating and degrading treatment, and the passing of sentences “without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognized as indispensable by civilized peoples.”

The legal analysis contained in a [September 2020 GEE report](#) notes that enforced disappearance also violates various obligations under customary international humanitarian law, including the prohibition on arbitrary deprivation of liberty, respect for detainees' family life and permission to receive visitors, as per the ICRC Study on Customary

International Humanitarian Law, rule 126. “The combined effect of these obligations has led to a recognition that enforced disappearance is prohibited by customary international humanitarian law,” concludes the GEE.

Yemeni Law: Various acts carried out as part of enforced disappearance violate [Article 48 of Yemen’s constitution](#):

- **Article 48(b):** “No person may be imprisoned or detained in places other than those designated as such and governed by the law of prisons.”
- **Article 48(c):** “Any person temporarily apprehended on suspicion of committing a crime shall be presented in front of a court within a maximum of 24 hours from the time of his detention... In any cases, the Prosecutor is not entitled to continue detention of the accused individual more than several days except with a judicial order.”
- **Article 48(d):** “Upon arrest, for whatever reason, a person may immediately contact someone of his choice. The same notification shall be repeated whenever a court orders the continuation of the detention.”

Enforced disappearance as carried out by conflict parties also appears to violate Yemen’s criminal code, [as per Amnesty International](#). The implicated laws include articles 73 and 76 of the Criminal Procedure Law of 1994, “which among other requirements stipulate that persons deprived of their liberty should be allowed to contact whomever they see fit, and be brought before the judiciary within 24 hours of the arrest.”

Finally, enforced disappearance violates article 9, item 3 of [The Prison Interest Organization Law](#) 48 of 1991, which specifies that the prison administration must notify the prisoner’s family of his location, as well as notify them if he is moved to another prison. Enforced disappearance also violates article 30 of the same law, which stipulates that prisoners are granted the right to meet with their family and friends, receive and respond to correspondence, and receive monetary transfers.

Torture and other Ill-Treatment

International Human Rights Law: Torture and other ill-treatment violates Article 7 of the ICCPR, which Yemen has ratified: “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

In addition, torture and ill treatment violate the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), which Yemen ratified in 1991. [Article 2 of CAT states:](#)

- “1. Each State Party shall take effective legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent acts of torture in any territory under its jurisdiction.
2. No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture.
3. An order from a superior officer or a public authority may not be invoked as a justification of torture.”

International Humanitarian Law: As noted by the legal analysis contained in a [September GEE 2020 report](#), torture and cruel, humiliating and degrading treatment of persons not actively participating in hostilities are explicitly prohibited under international humanitarian law, with this conduct constituting a war crime. If torture is conducted as part of a “widespread and systematic attack against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack,” it can give rise to a crime against humanity.

Yemeni Law:

- **Article 48(e)** of Yemen’s constitution prohibits “physical and psychological torture” and specifies that “all those who practice, order, or participate in executing, physical or psychological torture shall be punished.”
- **Article 166** of Yemen’s Penal Code of 1994 [stipulates](#) up to 10 years in prison for using torture or force to extract confessions.

In addition to torture and ill-treatment, the living conditions inside detention facilities described in this report would appear to violate various articles of Yemen’s [Prison Interest Organization Law](#) 48 of 1991. These include:

- **Article 23** specifies that the prison administration must take an interest in general health conditions inside the facility; treat prisoners and provide healthcare, including preventative healthcare; and appoint specialized doctors in coordination with the health ministry.
- **Article 26** stipulates that when a prisoner suffers a mental disorder or illness, he will be moved to a psychological hospital based on the report of a specialist doctor.

Section Two:

Violations against the Liberty and Integrity of a Person Across Yemen in Numbers

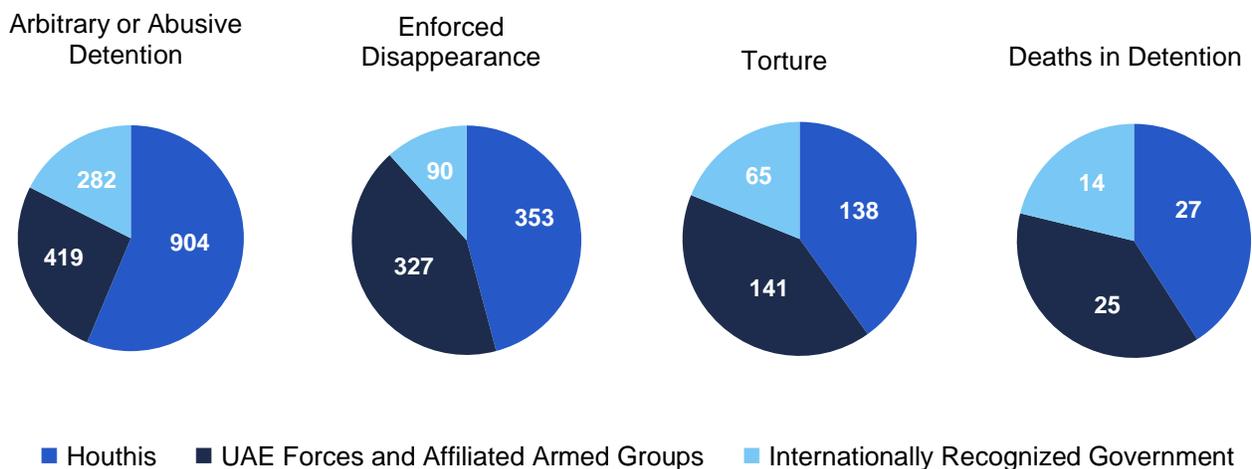
Secrecy and denial characterize violations against personal liberty in Yemen. These abuses take place behind closed doors in facilities that are often unofficial. Conflict parties have an active interest in concealing violations they perpetrate against detainees in order to avoid local and international condemnation. One violation type profiled in this report, enforced disappearance, entails by definition a denial that the perpetrator is holding the victim in detention. Fear of rearrest and revictimization haunt released detainees, meaning that many do not share their stories with human rights organizations. Compounding this issue, conflict actors often extract pledges that released detainees will not talk to human rights organizations or the media about their time in detention.

For all of these reasons and more, comprehensive, accurate estimates revealing the true extent of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture across Yemen are unavailable. Nevertheless, Yemeni organizations have worked extensively on these issues and documented hundreds—sometimes thousands—of cases. Looking at the sum total of their work provides a window into the extent of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture in Yemen.

The below graphs show the number of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture cases compiled by Yemeni organizations Mwatana, AMA, and SAM. They vary considerably from one organization to the next due to differences in methodology, access, and geographic scope. While Mwatana and SAM’s estimates encompass all of Yemen, AMA’s estimates are confined to the five provinces where AMA is active.

Mwatana Data on Cases of Detention, Enforced Disappearance and Torture

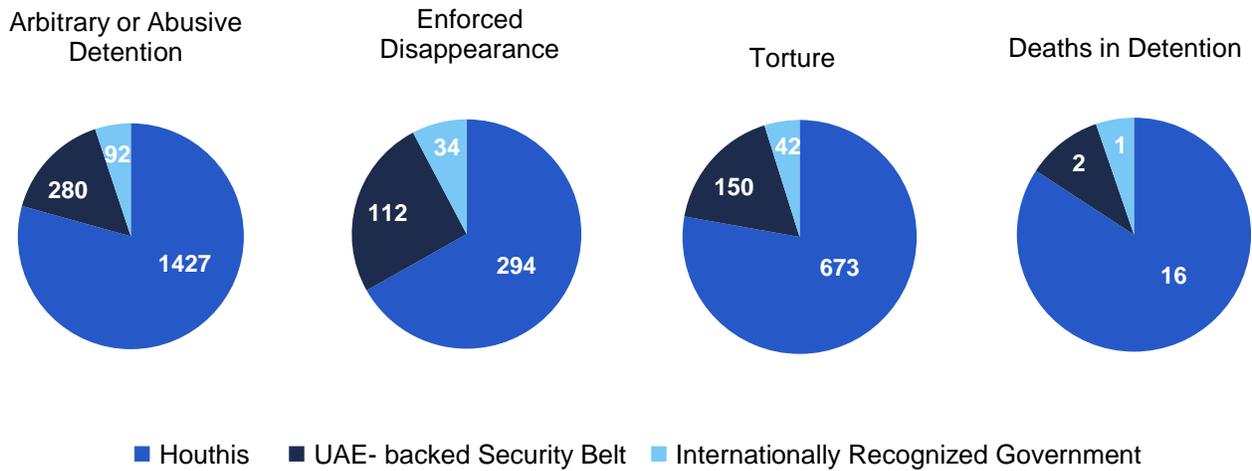
This data shows case numbers covering the period from May 2016 to December 2019 and encompassing all of Yemen



Source: Mwatana 2020 report, “In the Darkness: Abusive Detention, Disappearance and Torture in Yemen’s Unofficial Prisons”

AMA Data on Cases of Detention, Enforced Disappearance and Torture

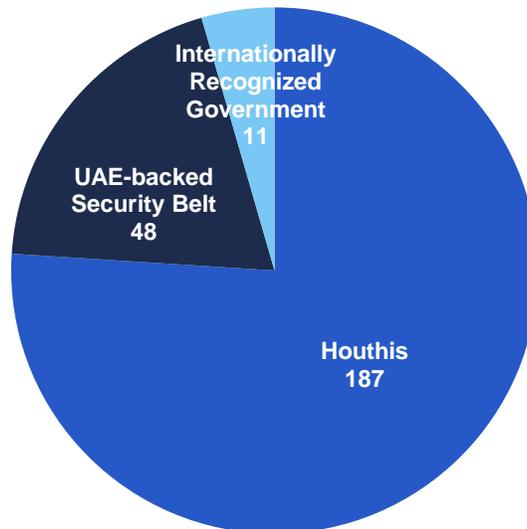
This data shows case numbers covering the period from 2018 to 2022 (start and end months were not specified by AMA) and encompassing the following provinces: Sana'a, Aden, Mareb, Taiz, and Dhamar



Source: Unpublished AMA report, an advance copy of which was provided to DT Institute

SAM Data on Cases of Enforced Disappearance

This data shows case numbers covering the period from 2015 to 2021 (start and end months were not specified by SAM) and encompassing cases across Yemen



Source: SAM 2021 report, "The Long Absence: A Human Rights Report Documenting Cases of Enforced Disappearance in Yemen During the Period from 2015 to 2021."

Taken together, these graphs show the Houthis and UAE-backed forces as together responsible for the lion's share of personal liberty violations as observed by these Yemeni NGOs, with the internationally recognized government responsible for a significant minority of violations. These cases represent only a fraction of total cases that occur in Yemen.

In addition to the estimates provided in this section, DT Institute has compiled relevant estimates on the numbers of arbitrarily detained, forcibly disappeared, and tortured in each target area covered in this report, which are presented at the beginning of each area section.

Section Three:

Common Characteristics of Arbitrary Detention, Enforced Disappearance, and Torture in Yemen

Arbitrary detention enforced disappearance and torture in Yemen are overlapping violation types. Arbitrary detention is frequently a precursor to enforced disappearance; both violation types are carried out in conjunction with torture and ill-treatment. While the nature of these violations varies from case to case, a review of relevant open-source reports and case files revealed the following common characteristics of each violation type.

Common Characteristics of Arbitrary Detentions

Note: As arbitrary detention is often a precursor to enforced disappearance in Yemen, the characteristics described in this section apply to enforced disappearances as well.

- 1) [Political considerations](#) often motivate arbitrary detentions, as Yemenis are detained on the basis of real or perceived opposition to the local authorities in power. Politically-motivated detentions target all types of people: members of opposition political parties, students, journalists, human rights defenders, day laborers, etc. Sometimes the victim is detained after engaging in political expression such as posting statements critical of authorities on social media. In other cases, the victim is targeted because their last name is associated with an opposition political actor, or because they hail from a province seen by the detaining party as suspicious. Frequent travel to or from provinces held by opposing parties is a common pretext for arbitrary detention.
- 2) [Detainees are often](#) not informed of why they have been detained and are not formally charged with a crime.
- 3) [When trials of the arbitrarily detained do occur](#), they often do so without due process standards including the right to legal representation. [Lawyers are denied access to their clients and when access is granted](#), the environment is not conducive to confidential and safe communication, e.g., prison guards are present nearby. [Defendants and lawyers have limited access to case files](#).
- 4) [Detainees are pressured](#) into making self-incriminating statements and confessions following torture and other cruel and inhuman treatment.
- 5) Time in detention can range widely, from weeks to years. Some individuals arbitrarily detained at the beginning of the conflict in late 2014/early 2015 remain in detention today.
- 6) Detaining parties often do not cooperate with requests to release the detainees issued by judicial authorities in their area.
- 7) Victims of arbitrary detention can be branded with stigma, alongside their families. “When aid organizations come, the neighborhood notables won’t deal with us—they’ll say ‘don’t get involved with that family, that’s the family of a terrorist,’” an AMA researcher in Aden whose husband was detained, and forcibly disappeared told DT Institute.
- 8) The arbitrarily detained are sometimes released following the payment of bribes, or other monetary sums to the perpetrators or those who have influence over the perpetrators.
- 9) The arbitrarily detained are sometimes released as part of prisoner exchanges with other conflict actors regardless of their participation, or lack thereof, in hostilities.

Case Files: Ahmed, Samer, and Mohammad

Ahmed – Detained by the Houthis in 2022 in Sana’a under the pretext that he had defaced a Houthi image. He was held for days in detention and forced to sign papers whose contents he did not understand in order to secure his release.

Source: AMA case files

Samer – A journalist who was arrested in Aden in 2019 without a warrant by security forces loyal to the STC. While in detention he was prohibited from communicating with family members, and treated in a discriminatory manner as he hails from the northern provinces. Security forces threatened his family members who were trying to follow up on his case. Samer was released before the end of 2019. His case file notes that his arrest likely aimed at discouraging independent media work in Aden.

Source: SAM case files

Mohammad – A soldier who traveled to Marib to collect his salary early in the conflict, when he was arrested by government-affiliated security forces and held incommunicado for over two years. While in detention Mohammad was accused of communicating with the Houthis and aiding their war effort, and subsequently sentenced to death. Mohammad’s family is unable to afford the cost of travel to Marib to follow up on his case, or to hire dedicated counsel for him.

Source: SAM case files

Common Characteristics of Enforced Disappearances

- 1) Conflict actors regularly use unofficial detention sites to hold the forcibly disappeared.
- 2) The uncertainty inherent in enforced disappearance inflicts psychological pain on victims’ families. Family members do not know whether their loved one has been detained, or disappeared in other circumstances; where they are; or whether they are alive or dead.
- 3) Families of the disappeared regularly pay sums of money to individuals connected to the conflict actor they suspect has taken their loved one, in order to learn information about the disappeared. Often these efforts prove in vain.
- 4) The multiplicity of security forces operating in a given area, and the frequent transfer of detainees from one facility to another, complicates families’ efforts to locate missing loved ones.
- 5) [Enforced disappearances range](#) from a period of several months to years. Some individuals who disappeared at the early stage of the Yemeni conflict have never resurfaced. Prominent examples include journalist Waheed al-Sufi, who disappeared in 2015 in Sana’a and is presumably in Houthi detention today; and [Ayoub Salihi and Akram Hamid](#), detained by government-affiliated forces in Taiz in 2016.

Case Files: Talal, Mumin, Dr. Mustafa

Talal – Detained by Houthi forces in 2022 in Taiz as he was returning from another Yemeni province. After his arrest Talal disappeared and his phone was turned off. His family subsequently received a phone call from a Houthi-affiliated individual regarding Talal, following which his relative visited a Houthi-run prison facility to inquire after him. The relative found Talal's name on the prison registry but was not allowed to talk to him or see him, and he remains in detention today.

Source: AMA case files

Mumin – Based in a government-controlled area, Mumin traveled regularly to Sana'a for medical treatment. In 2022 he called his family from Sana'a and informed them that a friend had told him the Houthis were suspicious of him due to his frequent travel and that he would be interrogated. Following that call Mumin disappeared and has not been heard from since.

Source: AMA case files

Dr. Mustafa al-Mutawakkel, Head of the Houthi Investment Bureau – Arrested and forcibly disappeared on April 27, 2017, at the al-Falaj checkpoint in Marib, as he was returning to Sana'a following participation at a conference in Morocco. When his wife traveled to Marib from Sana'a to search for Dr. Al-Mutawakkel, her lawyer received a call from an unknown number, who informed the lawyer that Dr. al-Mutawakkel was no longer in Marib, as he had been handed over to Saudi Arabia.

Source: [SAM Long Absence Report](#)

Common Characteristics of Torture and Other Ill-Treatment

- 1) Detainees are held in cramped and unsanitary conditions with limited access to food and clean water.
- 2) Appropriate medical care is regularly denied to detainees and many emerge from detention with chronic medical conditions.
- 3) Common methods of torture employed by conflict parties include beatings with sticks and metal bars, whipping with electric cables, hanging from the ceiling, nail removal, and electrocution.
- 4) [Torture often results in permanent injuries or disabilities.](#) Various rights groups and the GEE have [documented cases](#) in which torturers targeted sensitive or already-injured areas in order to cause permanent disabilities.

- 5) The use of sexual violence by all major local conflict parties has been documented by rights groups, media organizations and the GEE against women and girls, and men and boys. This includes rape, threats of rape, beating and the burning of genitals.
- 6) Torture is often conducted in order to force a confession from the victim, including written confessions that are signed by pen or fingerprint without the detainee knowing what is written in them.
- 7) Detainees are sometimes released when their health has deteriorated to the point that they are nearly dead.

Case Files: Anwar and Sonya

Anwar – A political activist detained by the Houthis in Taiz in September 2017. His family did not know his whereabouts for ten months, until a brother went to the al-Saleh facility to visit a detained friend, at which point he located Anwar by chance. The brother had difficulty recognizing Anwar because of his severe weight loss. The Houthi authorities then agreed to release Anwar because, according to his brother, he was “on death’s door.” Relatives took Anwar to a hospital. There, Anwar informed his family that while in prison, he had been deprived of sleep, food, and had been forcibly injected with a substance he did not know, but that burned so badly he thought it was hydrofluoric acid. The doctor informed Anwar’s family that his body was not responding to medicine or nutrient solutions, and he died two days after his release in August 2018.

Source: AMA report “Justice for the Kidnapped”

Sonya – Arrested in Sana’a for her tweets critical of Houthi authorities in March 2019. As Sonya was going to fill up her car with gas, masked, armed men with the Houthis’ preventative security division surrounded her car, beat her with their rifle butts and led her to the national security building where she was held in a small isolation cell for four months, she told AMA. During interrogations she was subject to torture and ill-treatment including being splashed with cold water then shocked with electricity, being beaten and kicked, having holes poked in her stomach and back with a sharp instrument, and the tearing off of one of her toenails.

“They threatened to tear off an additional nail every day, and I felt my strength collapse—I screamed ‘I’ll confess that I killed the entire Yemeni people, just kill me, because death is more merciful than this torture,’” she told AMA.

Sonya said that her extremities swelled up because of the torture and dehydration, prompting prison authorities to move her to Sana’a Central Prison, where she was allowed to communicate with her family and inform them of her whereabouts. After her family enlisted the help of Houthi mediators and her brothers in Saudi Arabia paid a sum of money she was released in 2020.

Source: AMA report “Justice for the Kidnapped”

Section Four:

Violations against the Liberty and Integrity of a Person in Sana'a

Cases of Arbitrary Detention, Enforced Disappearance, and Torture in Sana'a

Arbitrary Detention	Enforced Disappearance	Torture	Reporting Body	Time Period	Location	Source
509	119	296	AMA	2018-2022	Across Sana'a	Advanced copy of report, "Justice for the Kidnapped"
504			Women for Peace Yemen	2014-2022	Sana'a Central Prison	Statement from NGO chief at July human rights conference in Aden
279			GEE	Mid 2019 – September 2020	Residential buildings turned into detention facilities	September 2020 GEE Report A/HRC/45/CRP.7
	21		GEE	Mid 2019 – September 2020	Across Sana'a	September 2020 GEE Report A/HRC/45/CRP.7
159		32	Mwatana	Mid 2016 – April 2020	Security and Intelligence Agency	2020 Mwatana report "In the Darkness"

Since late 2014 the Houthis have arbitrarily detained, forcibly disappeared, and tortured thousands of Yemenis across areas of their control. Many of these violations have occurred in Sana'a that was captured by the Houthis in September 2014. In addition to detentions carried out in Sana'a proper, detainees arrested by the Houthis in other Yemeni provinces are regularly transported to Sana'a for holding. "I can't give an estimate [on the number of the arbitrarily detained and disappeared in Sana'a] because the Houthi group has brought hundreds of prisoners from other provinces there...but according to the testimony of some who have been released, the number may exceed 2,000 currently in Sana'a's prisons," an AMA researcher who works in Sana'a told DT Institute.

A series of formal and informal detention sites have been used to hold the arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared in Yemen's capital. Formal sites include the Security and Intelligence Prison (formerly the National Security Agency and Political Security Agency Prisons), the Security and Intelligence Rehabilitation Center, the Central Security Prison, Sana'a Central Prison, and Habra Reserve Prison. Informal sites include former residential buildings. [Detainees are sometimes moved](#) between secret and official facilities, complicating their families' efforts to locate them. [Torture and ill-treatment](#) are routine in these facilities.

Nevertheless, the pace and severity of arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and torture appears to have decreased in recent years compared to the start of the conflict, according to AMA and SAM researchers who work in Sana'a. "The period of enforced disappearance used to range from three months to a year, now you might find it last for a period of days up to three months, no more, except rarely. The pace of arrests and detention periods have gotten noticeably lighter," said one SAM researcher. "It's noticeable that the period of disappearance and detention has decreased considerably from previous years, and the torture methods employed are not at the same level of brutality," said the AMA researcher. It is unclear what combination of factors has produced this change; there are no indications the Houthis have changed their fundamental approach towards personal liberty violations since the conflict began.

The following section explores patterns and themes in arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture in Sana'a:

Crushing Political Dissent

In Sana'a, the Houthis have primarily targeted perceived opponents of their rule, broadly defined, for arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance and torture, [employing these](#) overlapping violation types to suppress dissent and [cement their authoritarian grip](#). Victims include individuals who have written critical social media posts, members of opposition political parties, journalists, and human rights defenders. Sometimes the flimsiest of justifications has sufficed as grounds for detention. These include intent to travel to an area controlled by the Southern Transitional Council (STC) or the government, or arriving in Sana'a from STC and government-held governorates. In addition to perceived political opponents, the Houthi authorities have targeted religious minorities, particularly the Bahai, because of their beliefs.

The terror that results from widespread detention, disappearance and torture serves to deter potential opposition to Houthi rule from society, as per the admission of Houthi officials themselves. The brother of Houthi leader Abdel Malek al-Houthi established a committee in 2016 to investigate torture and detention in areas of Houthi control. Before it was disbanded by hardliners within the Houthi movement, the committee sent a [video report](#) to Houthi leader Abdel Malek that was viewed by the Associated Press. "[What we saw would](#) make you cry tears of blood...to see people with disabilities, coming out of prison after excessive torture will terrify everyone: Look, this will happen to you if you speak up," one committee member said during the video.

Case Files: Issa, Shadi, and Feras

Issa – An academic detained in 2022 after writing posts on Facebook criticizing Houthi policies. Since his arrest his family has been prevented from visiting him.

Source: AMA case files

Shadi – Displaced from a government-held Yemeni governorate and working as a manual laborer in Sana'a, he was detained by the Houthis in 2022. During Shadi's monthslong detention he was beaten and accused of spying for government authorities. He was released after being threatened with execution if he communicated with anyone from his home governorate.

Source: AMA case files

Feras – A manual laborer detained in 2022 after talking about his intention to travel to a government-held governorate to secure a better-paying job. During his detention Feras was beaten and threatened with execution if he thought about traveling to the government-held governorate again.

Source: AMA case files

Politically Motivated Trials

[The process of arrest, detention, and trial across Houthi areas including Sana'a](#) is characterized by a lack of basic rights. [Individuals are often arrested without warrants](#), and for no identified cause. They are [frequently refused](#) the right to appear before a judge or consult a lawyer. One jurist [described](#) the criminal trial process in Sana'a to Mwatana as follows: "The accused's lawyer is allowed to see his/her client only once or twice, while the prosecution conducts long investigations with detainees at night, not permitted by Yemeni law, and during which the detainee is blindfolded. The detainee's statements are taken under threat and psychological pressure. Whether in front of the public prosecution, or in the courtroom, the lawyer is often not allowed to plead, or to take a copy of the case file."

Sana'a is home to the Specialized Criminal Court, established in 1999 [and historically used](#) for cases involving terrorism and other security-related offenses, such as drug trafficking and attacking members of the judiciary. The Houthis took over the Specialized Criminal Court when they captured Sana'a and [under Houthi](#) authority the court has handed down "harsh sentences, including the death penalty, following grossly unfair charges" in order to crush dissent, Amnesty International noted in a March 2020 report. Amnesty International [documented](#) the cases of 66 people, mostly men, whose cases were brought before the court between 2015 and 2020, including journalists, human rights defenders, political opponents and religious minorities. [All of their cases](#) were ongoing at the time of the report's publication and all were being tried on charges of spying, which carries a mandatory death penalty.

[A September 2020 GEE report](#) emphasized that the specialized criminal courts, particularly in Sana'a, "are being used as an instrument to suppress dissent, intimidate political opponents and/or develop political capital to be used in negotiations. Rights of the accused are regularly denied. Significant control [over the courts] is exercised by the security and political leadership." [Another September 2020 GEE report](#) identified three cases as emblematic of the Sana'a Specialized Criminal Court's politicized function:

- 35 members of Yemeni parliament were sentenced to death in absentia on March 4, 2020; the charges appear to have been politically motivated and were used as pretext to seize the defendants' property. Defendants who spoke to the GEE said they had never received formal communication regarding their case and learned of the verdict through social media.
- 10 journalists were arbitrarily detained in 2015, and convicted on April 11, 2020 of national security offenses during [a sham trial](#). Four were sentenced to die, while the remaining six were sentenced to time served. These verdicts follow more than four years of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture. The cause of the four journalists on death row has garnered international attention and various foreign and Yemeni rights organizations have campaigned on behalf of their release, including YHRFL partners Free Media, SAM, and SEMC.
- 36 academics were charged with supporting the government and Islah party's military efforts, 30 of whom were sentenced to death on July 7, 2019; the remaining six were released. The thirty sentenced academics had their property confiscated despite no formal confiscation order being issued.

Case Files: Amer and Mustafa

Amer – A retired officer in the Yemeni armed forces who wrote critical posts about the Houthis on social media. Amer was detained in 2016 before being sentenced to death by the Specialized Criminal Court in Sana’a on charges of spying and supporting the enemy Saudi Arabia. Amer suffered at least two strokes before dying of illness in November 2021.

Source: SAM case files

Mustafa – A member of a political party that opposes the Houthis, Mustafa was arrested in 2016. When his family visited him for the first time since his detention, Mustafa informed them that he had been tortured nearly to death, “and he spoke as if giving his last will,” notes his case file. Subsequently Mustafa was charged with crimes including treason, and sentenced to death by the Specialized Criminal Court in Sana’a. The execution order has not yet been carried out.

Source: SAM case files

Campaign of Sexual Violence against Women and Girls

[In a September 2020 report](#) the GEE documented a Houthi campaign of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture, including sexual violence, targeting women and girls in Sana’a because of their political views and activity. These violations [occurred](#) in at least five residential buildings in and around the capital from December 2017 to December 2019. The GEE verified six women who had been raped by Houthi individuals, “with several being raped on multiple occasions over extended periods,” and noted that they had received “credible reports” of an estimated 279 women and girls detained in these facilities. [Women and girls](#) were held incommunicado for between one and nine months and some for reportedly longer.

While the women and girls were detained for political activity—such as participation in protests, speaking out against the Houthis, or involvement in women’s rights work—the Houthi authorities directed accusations against them that mixed political and moral crimes: prostitution and immorality, spying, affiliation with enemy groups, and supporting the Saudi-led coalition. In detention the victims were subject to “a routine of humiliation, indoctrination and torture, including rape,” noted the GEE. Male interrogators and female guards [described](#) the rapes as “purification” and “rehabilitation” for the detainees’ sins. “The rapes broke some survivors’ wills, and combined with the isolation and humiliation, left them hopeless and suicidal,” [the GEE continued](#).

The GEE [concluded](#) that while the Houthis engaged in this campaign of sexual violence under the pretext of resisting what the group has described as an external “soft war” against Yemeni morality, it was in actuality a calculated move to crush dissent. “The de facto authorities appeared to use such accusations, detention and rape in the knowledge that they would attract severe stigma for women and girls, and that they would also have a deterrent effect on victims and their families, pressuring them to conform and comply with Houthi authority, preventing families from reporting violations or following-up on release, and placing survivors and families at risk of social exclusion, community violence and long-term harm.”

It is unclear how many of these women and girls were formally charged with a crime. [One estimate](#) provided by Nouri al-Juri, head of the Women’s Alliance for Peace in Yemen, at a June 2022 human rights conference in Aden noted that 193 women had been sentenced by Houthi courts on accusations of “spying, involvement in prostitution networks, and prosecuting a ‘soft war.’”

Case Files: Janeen

Janeen – Arrested at a protest in October 2018 in Sana’a by a group of around 20 undercover, female Houthi security forces carrying batons and electric prods. Janeen told AMA that once she arrived at the police station along with around 3 dozen other women and girls who had been at the protest “they searched us in a humiliating manner three times.” Authorities allowed her to contact her family after an interrogation. She was allowed to leave the station that same night after being forced to sign pledges not to participate in any future protests. Some girls were prohibited from leaving until after their relatives were detained in their place, she noted to AMA.

Source: AMA report “Justice for the Kidnapped”

Bribery and Ransom

Two researchers with AMA told DT Institute that arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance in Houthi-held areas, including Sana’a, are often followed by monetary extortion. This dovetails with findings from [rights groups](#), the [GEE](#) and [press reports](#). “Families are blackmailed by various personalities in their neighborhood, influential personalities within the Houthi group, on false promises that the detainee will be released, or to allow them a visit. Sometimes [the Houthi-affiliated personalities will say] ‘give us money and we’ll give it to the detainee inside prison.’ And the sums don’t arrive,” the first AMA researcher told DT Institute.

The second researcher recounted to DT Institute her family’s journey to locate her two brothers detained by the Houthis, which involved the payment of monetary sums: “When they took my first brother, my father went to police departments to inquire after him. They told him ‘we don’t have him’ – or someone with influence among the Houthis would tell him, ‘give me such and such an amount, so I can give it to people who will ask on your behalf inside the police departments and prisons.’ The same thing happened when my second brother was detained: My dad searched in vain and he gave them [Houthi-affiliated personalities] sums of money. Although he had learned his lesson with my first brother, he thought perhaps he might get some information on his son, whom he doesn’t know whether he’s alive or dead...Especially when there is news about prisoner exchanges, influential [Houthi-affiliated] people begin to approach families and say, ‘Give us this amount so we release your son.’”

Case Files: Mohammad and Ahmed

Mohammad – A trader detained by the Houthis in 2022. His case file notes he was mistreated in detention but does not provide further detail. Mohammad was subsequently informed that he had been arrested due to a case of mistaken identity, but was only freed after paying a sum of money.

Source: AMA case files

Ahmed – A journalist detained in October 2018 as he was on the way to cover protests in Sana’a. He was forcibly disappeared for five months in the criminal pursuit division, during which time he was held in solitary confinement and beaten, before being transferred to two additional facilities, both in Sana’a. His wife and children were allowed to visit six months after his initial detention and disappearance. Ahmed’s family paid sums of money in order to secure his release, including selling the house furniture to gather money, but the payments were in vain. It initially appeared that Ahmed would be released from detention as part of the Stockholm agreement inked in December 2018 between the Houthis and internationally recognized government, but he was returned to prison. Finally, Ahmed was released as part of a prisoner exchange deal in September 2019, although he was exiled from Sana’a to Marib.

Source: AMA report “Justice for the Kidnapped”

Section Five: Violations against the Liberty and Integrity of a Person in Aden

Cases of Arbitrary Detention, Enforced Disappearance, and Torture in Aden

Arbitrary Detention	Enforced Disappearance	Torture	Reporting Body	Time Period	Location	Source
280	112	150	AMA	2018-2022	Across Aden	Advanced coy of report, “Justice for the Kidnapped”
57		43	Mwatana	May 2016 – April 2020	Waddah Hall, al-Jala Camp, Coalition Camp	2020 Mwatana report “In the Darkness”

In 2017 the Associated Press and Human Rights Watch revealed the existence of at least 18 secret prisons in southern Yemen, chiefly in Aden and Mukalla. These secret facilities, alongside other official detention facilities, were used by UAE and UAE-backed forces to hold arbitrarily detained, and forcibly disappeared people accused of belonging to terrorist groups, [many of whom](#) were never formally charged with a crime or tried in court. The Human Rights Watch and Associated Press reports, as well as subsequent reports from international and local news outlets and human rights organizations, exposed the horrific abuse of detainees in these facilities, including widespread sexual torture.

The pace of arbitrary detentions and disappearances has decreased in Aden in recent years, AMA and SAM researchers told DT Institute. This appears to be due to several factors: the STC consolidating power over Aden after a power struggle with the internationally recognized government; repeated protests organized by AMA and other local organizations against arbitrary detention, forced disappearance, and torture; and the appointment of the general prosecutor (see “Competing Jurisdictions” section below). “At the beginning of the conflict there was a

strong, and fierce wave of detentions from all sides—political and security detentions, detentions based on personal expression, like writing on Facebook,” a SAM researcher who documents violations against personal liberty in Aden told DT Institute. “Now the pace has decreased considerably, and detainees are released quickly, particularly after the general prosecutor was appointed.”

Nevertheless, UAE and UAE-backed local forces continue to detain, disappear, and torture Yemenis inside Aden’s now-notorious detention sites. Current detention facilities include Waddah Hall, the Jabal Hadeed Camp Prison, al-Nasr Camp Prison, the Central Prison at Mansoura, and Bir Ahmed II.

The following section explores patterns and themes in arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture in Aden:

Settling Political Scores

As with conflict actors across Yemen, UAE-backed forces in Aden have tended to target individuals perceived to be opposed to their rule for arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture. This includes [journalists](#) and activists who have criticized the UAE or coalition practices and military operations; members of the Islah party; and [former fighters](#) who helped oust the Houthis from Aden in 2015 but who belong to military units unaffiliated with local ruling powers. Many detainees have been [accused](#) of belonging to al-Qaida or other extremist organizations. After relations deteriorated between the internationally recognized government and STC, UAE-backed forces have also picked up individuals on [charges of cooperating with the government](#).

Like politically-motivated violations explored elsewhere in this report, sometimes cases of detention, disappearance and torture in Aden rest on the flimsiest of justifications, such as individuals being targeted because they hail from Yemen’s northern provinces.

Case Files: Ibrahim and Abdul Qader

Ibrahim – A security guard who was detained in 2021 following political disagreements between his boss and a local military commander in Aden. He remains in detention today without any information available on the official charges directed against him.

Source: AMA case files

Abdul Qader – A wheelchair bound sixty-five-year-old man suffering from a broken pelvis and brain tumor, who was detained by masked men wearing civilian clothing in November 2020 in Aden. He was traveling from Taiz to Egypt to receive medical treatment when he was arrested. The reason for his detention was unclear but likely related to his being originally from Taiz in northern Yemen. Abdul Qader was released from detention in August 2021.

Source: SAM report [The Long Absence](#)

Widespread Sexual Abuse

“It’s become the southern forces’ distinguishing mark: they use sexual violence to deal with their prisoners,” an AMA researcher who works in Aden told DT Institute. While sexual violence has been employed against detainees by all of Yemen’s conflict parties, UAE and UAE-backed forces have become infamous for the widespread and brutal sexual torture they have inflicted on detainees in facilities across areas of their control, including the Bir Ahmed, Bureiqa, and Waddah Hall facilities in Aden. [Witnesses told Associated Press](#) in a June 2018 report that Yemeni guards under UAE direction have raped detainees while other guards film the assaults; electrocuted prisoners’ genitals; hung rocks from their testicles; and sexually violated detainees with wooden and steel poles.

Notable incidents of sexual assault documented by the GEE include:

- [200 detainees were stripped naked in March 2018](#) at Bir Ahmed prison and had their anuses forcibly examined by UAE forces, including digital rape with tools and sticks.
- [The GEE verified 14 cases](#) of rape and sexual violence committed against men and boys at the al-Bureiqa coalition base in Aden before UAE forces withdrew from the base in mid-2019.
- [The GEE verified a case in July 2019](#) in which a government of Yemen soldier raped a man twice who had been “detained by these forces for his work as a human rights defender documenting alleged violations by coalition Forces.”
- [The GEE investigated](#) the rape of Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Somali migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees at the Bureiqa migrant detention facility in Aden. “Survivors and witnesses described to the experts how each night guards selected women and boys for abuse...Women were told to submit to rape or commit suicide. Others reported that individuals trying to resist or intervene were beaten, shot or killed. At least once guards ordered hundreds of Ethiopian male detainees to stand naked for hours in front of dozens of Ethiopian female detainees as punishment.”

In addition to [humiliating detainees and forcing confessions](#), the widespread use of sexual violence in these facilities was intended to recruit informants, [according to a former security chief](#) involved in torturing detainees who spoke to AP on condition of anonymity. “In some cases, they rape the detainee, film him while raping, use it as a way to force him to work for them,” he said.

Case Files: Ahmed and Abdullah

Ahmed Maher – A journalist highly critical of local authorities who was arrested by the Dar Saad police on August 6, 2022. Initially Maher was held at the Dar Saad police station where he was subjected to beatings, and his family threatened with rape, including his five-month-old daughter. Maher was pressured through this ill-treatment into making false confessions concerning working with “northern enemies” against the south. In late August a clip circulated on social media showing Maher confessing to helping militants carry out assassination operations targeting leaders within the STC. A month and a half after his initial detention the Yemeni prosecutor’s office interrogated Maher without a lawyer, and in the presence of the police official who had tortured him. Maher was then transferred to Bir Ahmed prison. The official charges leveled against Maher include “threatening public peace” and his trial is scheduled to begin within the coming months. His family has left Aden for fear of retaliation.

Source: SAM case files

Abdullah – A qatt seller originally from Dhamar, Abdullah was arrested in October 2020 at his home alongside his relatives, shortly after the arrest of a colleague. Abdullah was tortured at an Aden police station in front of his wife and child, according to testimony from his wife provided to AMA.

“I fainted from witnessing the severity of the torture, so they doused me with water to wake me up, then they slapped me in the face and hit me in front of my husband, and threatened me. My husband begged the station chief to leave me alone and that he would confess to whatever they wanted, as they were threatening to rape me if he didn’t confess.”

Abdullah’s wife was allowed to return home following this ordeal but she waited six months before learning her husband’s whereabouts at the Bir Ahmed prison. Until today she has not seen her husband again, and does not know whether he is alive or dead.

“He and the others arrested alongside him are innocent, their only crime is being from the northern provinces,” she told AMA.

AMA report “Justice for the Kidnapped”

Other Methods of Torture and Ill-treatment

Alongside sexual torture, UAE and UAE-backed forces have employed other forms of torture and ill-treatment in facilities under their control. [According to survivors](#) these methods include extreme temperature exposure; severe beatings; electrocution; nail removal; punching holes in the feet with an electric drill; and injections with unknown medications. [Another torture method detailed](#) by the Associated Press is “the grill,” in which a victim is tied to a spit and spun round in a circle of fire; one [survivor recounted](#) how he was spun so quickly he vomited blood.

Competing Jurisdictions

Aden is home to various UAE-backed local security forces, forces with the Saudi-led coalition, and offices of the internationally recognized government. Families of detainees and the disappeared often receive no information about where, or why their loved ones have been taken, and [must navigate](#) a complicated web of security forces in order to locate them. [Sometimes](#) they are unsure which force has made the initial arrest.

By [August 2017](#) the Yemeni government Prosecutor General Ali al-A’wash had moved to Aden and restarted the work of various government bureaus that had been frozen since 2015. Al-A’wash pushed to assert government control over detentions carried out by UAE-backed local forces: [he inspected prison facilities](#), fought to get families visitation access, and took over detainee case files, issuing release orders for some prisoners and sending others to court. [Summer 2018](#) witnessed a round of prisoner releases, and the whereabouts of hundreds of detainees was made known after they were transferred to facilities under the prosecutor general’s supervision. However, Ali al-A’wash and subsequent prosecutor generals’ efforts have only gone so far. [Prison officials who report to the UAE](#) have not implemented release orders for those prisoners the UAE opts to keep in detention, particularly those detained on terrorism charges, while certain detention facilities remain off-limits to the Yemeni government. Yemeni government officials [have repeatedly said](#) that they have no authority or oversight over the UAE-run prisons operating in Aden and other locations in the country’s south.

“Waddah Hall is still disappearing prisoners, they have no list of detainees’ names, while the Prosecutor General hasn’t been able to visit until now,” a SAM researcher who works in Aden told DT Institute. “The Hadeed Hill Prison Camp is also disappearing prisoners without their families knowing, the detainees aren’t transferred to the prosecution or the judiciary for interrogation. No one can reach the facility or learn who is imprisoned inside, and there is no communication with the prosecutors’ offices or the judiciary,” he added.

Section Six:

Violations against the Liberty and Integrity of a Person in Taiz

Cases of Arbitrary Detention, Enforced Disappearance, and Torture in Taiz

Arbitrary Detention	Enforced Disappearance	Torture	Reporting Body	Time Period	Location	Source
363	83	240	AMA	2018-2022	Across Taiz	Advanced copy of report, “Justice for the Kidnapped”
	84		Committee for the Follow-up on the Forcibly Disappeared	September 2014 – September 2022	Across Taiz	Press statements by Committee’s Executive Director Ahmed Taha al-Muaqabi
63		4	Mwatana	May 2016 – April 2020	Al-Saleh City Prisons	2020 Mwatana report “In the Darkness”
		15	GEE	September 2014 – June 2020	Al-Saleh City Prisons	September 2020 GEE Report A/HRC/45/6

In [April 2015](#) various anti-Houthi brigades in Taiz united to fight off a Houthi offensive that had reached the city’s outskirts, resulting in a longstanding military stalemate. Today, the Houthis impose a siege on Taiz from the north, west, and east, while forces affiliated with the government control the city proper. Meanwhile, [the short-lived unity of anti-Houthi forces gave way](#) to infighting after 2015. The Islah party, which dominates the Taiz Military Axis, the official body responsible for the city’s defense, booted its former allies, the UAE-backed Abu Abbas brigades, from the city in early 2019, and since then has gradually [consolidated its power](#) over Taiz.

Several main groups have engaged in arbitrary detention, forced disappearance, and torture in Taiz, with the pace of violations [reportedly](#) reaching their peak between 2015 and 2017. These actors include the government-affiliated Islah party within Taiz city proper, the Houthis in their areas of control surrounding the city, [and extremist groups](#) that were present in the city before being ejected by government forces.

The following section explores patterns and themes in arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture in Taiz:

Horrific Torture at Houthi-run Saleh City Facility

Houthi forces operate an infamous detention center at al-Saleh city, located in the Hawban area roughly 6 miles northeast of the Taiz city center. Local and international organizations groups, including [SAM](#), [AMA](#), [Mwatana](#), and the [GEE](#), have documented horrific torture inflicted on detainees held at the Saleh city detention facility. “Saleh prison is the largest prison in Taiz and run by Houthi military leadership. It’s broken into the National Security, Political Security, and Aden sections, and holds political detainees, activists, soldiers, and women. It’s the most brutal prison in Taiz that’s used to disappear detainees and torture them,” said an AMA researcher who works in Taiz.

[A 2021 AMA report](#) on the al-Saleh facility titled “The Stench of Death” documented seven detainees who died at the prison from March 2018 to December 2020 due to torture and/or medical neglect. The report also documented 60 children being arbitrarily detained at the facility.

In its September 2020 report, the GEE [reported](#) on 14 men and 1 boy, among them human rights activists, who were tortured at the al-Saleh facility during prolonged detention lasting from two to four years. Detainees were accused of affiliation with various military and political groups opposed to the Houthis. The torture generally occurred during night-time interrogation sessions during which detainees were forced to confess and sign documents whose contents they were unaware of. “Beatings involved strikes to the head and the back, with the intention of causing long-term disabilities, and to the legs, feet and genitals. Interrogators electrocuted detainees using electric cables attached to different parts of their bodies including the hands, tongue, testicles and penis, and detainees reported blacking out. Stress positions, the removal of fingers nails [sic], and threats including mock executions were also some of the other methods employed at the facility,” reported the GEE.

The al-Saleh prison facility continues to operate today. AMA documented 17 cases of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance carried out by the Houthis in Taiz from September to December 2020, according to case files provided to DT Institute. In 14 of these cases, victims were being held at the al-Saleh facility.

Case Files: Ahmed, Hadi, and Tawfig

Ahmed – A day laborer who was arrested at a Houthi-run checkpoint in 2022 as he was headed towards Taiz. When his family visited the al-Saleh detention center, local officials initially denied holding Ahmed. Months after his arrest a family member was allowed to visit Ahmed at the al-Saleh facility, who informed the relative that he was being tortured and implored his family to get him out of the facility. Ahmed died in detention in late 2022.

Source: AMA case files

Hadi – Arrested in 2017, Hadi was held at the al-Saleh facility and accused of being a leader in the anti-Houthi resistance, although an eyewitness told AMA that he appeared to be mentally ill. He was not allowed to call his family during his yearslong detention, and received no visits. Two years after his arrest he began to complain of pain in his chest, back, and heart, and asked for medical treatment, which the prison officials refused to provide. Hadi died in 2020, and on the night of his death, he was moaning and unable to sleep due to the pain.

Source: AMA case files

Tawfig – Arrested in February 2016 and held at al-Saleh prison. An eyewitness told AMA that Tawfig was tortured with electric shocks and beatings with sticks. He developed kidney failure, as well as diarrhea so severe that he would faint. He died in December 2019 as Houthi authorities were transporting him to a hospital. His mother told AMA: “When I went to pick up my son’s body, they first took me to court and gave me documents to sign—I didn’t know what they contained because I can’t read—then I went to take my son’s body and there was discoloration around his eyes and blood around his mouth.”

Source: AMA report “Justice for the Kidnapped”

Islah-led Political Detentions in Taiz Proper

The various anti-Houthi brigades in control of Taiz city, particularly Islah-affiliated military forces, have engaged in a campaign of arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances against residents and visitors to Taiz. The pace of detentions and disappearances appears to have peaked [between 2015 and 2017](#) as fighting raged between these anti-Houthi groups. [Detainees have been held](#) in unofficial detention facilities including at the al-Nahda School, the Public Funds Office, and Oversight and Accounting Bureau, and the National Institute. At least one of these unofficial detention sites, the Public Funds Office, is still active, an AMA researcher who works in Taiz told DT Institute.

[The Committee for the Follow-Up on the Forcibly Disappeared](#) observed 84 cases of enforced disappearance from September 2014 to September 2022 in Taiz carried out by anti-Houthi brigades. Victims ranging from 16 to 65 years old were held in unofficial detention sites, and their cases were not transferred to judicial authorities for processing. For its part, the GEE verified eight cases of enforced disappearance by the Taiz Military Axis and Islah-affiliated actors, ranging from several months to four years, in its [September 2020](#) report.

[Taiz residents have organized](#) regular protests against enforced disappearances. In addition, various governmental and non-governmental actors have pressured Taiz’s military forces to release information on the fate of the forcibly disappeared, with limited success. [In January 2019](#) Yemen’s Public Prosecutor sent a memorandum to the Prosecutor General of the Court of Appeal in Taiz requesting information on 34 forcibly disappeared individuals, and insisting they be tried or released immediately in accordance with the law. [Five of these individuals](#) were indeed released in October 2019, but with little movement on the remaining cases. In response to this January 2019 memorandum, the [Taiz Prosecutor General of the Court of Appeal reportedly claimed](#) that he had no authority over Taiz’s informal lockups. Most recently, the governor of Taiz sent a memorandum to the Taiz Military Axis in September 2021 requesting information on the fate of dozens of forcibly disappeared residents, but the Axis forces ignored the request.

Nevertheless, the rate of detentions and disappearances in Taiz has decreased, as has the amount of time the forcibly disappeared are held for, compared to earlier in the conflict, according to two AMA researchers who work in the city. “At the beginning of the conflict victims were held for a period stretching to two, or three years—today it reaches six months,” said one researcher. The other researcher attributed this decrease in the severity of personal liberty violations to the cessation of armed hostilities between the anti-Houthi forces inside Taiz city, as well as increased unity among the anti-Houthi bloc after the formation of Yemen’s Presidential Council.

Case Files: Wael, Abdul Hadi, Ayoub and Akram

Wael – Detained in 2019 by members of the Taiz Military Axis and held at a school that had been turned into an unofficial prison. During this time Wael was not allowed to contact his family. He died in detention. The Taiz Military Axis brought in a medical examiner who reported no foul play, and Wael’s family still has no closure regarding the circumstances behind their son’s death in detention.

Source: Watch4HR case files

Abdul Hadi – Detained in April 2019 as he was visiting his uncle in Taiz by militants with the Taiz “Special Forces Unit,” who claimed they had “orders from above” to arrest Abdul Hadi for security reasons. The following day his family went to the Special Forces headquarters, where the security forces initially denied holding Abdul Hadi. But after the family offered a bribe to an officer present, Abdul Hadi’s mother was allowed to see him. Two days later his family returned for a second visit, but they were informed that he had been moved to Aden, and since that time no information has been available on the victim or his whereabouts.

Source: [SAM Long absence report](#)

Ayoub Salihi and Akram Hamid – Salihi is a teacher affiliated with the Nasserist party; Akram is a soldier who had reportedly posted on social media about looting carried out by members of the military. [Both were detained in June 2016](#) and remain forcibly disappeared today, despite considerable public momentum and pressure in Taiz to reveal their fates. Journalist Riyadh al-Samia’i reported, relaying information from the leader of a local military unit, that al-Salihi [was executed in detention](#); however, this narrative has not been confirmed and al-Salihi’s family continues to call for any information on his fate.

Source: Open-source media reports

Section Seven:

Violations against the Liberty and Integrity of a Person in Marib

Cases of Arbitrary Detention, Enforced Disappearance, and Torture in Mareb

Arbitrary Detention	Enforced Disappearance	Torture	Reporting Body	Time Period	Location	Source
78	29	40	AMA	2018-2022	Across Mareb	Advanced copy of report, "Justice for the Kidnapped"
31		4	Mwatana	May 2016-April 2020	Political Security Department	2020 Mwatana report "In the Darkness"

The government's last stronghold in northern Yemen, Marib is home to several official and unofficial lockups that have been used to hold the arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared during the current conflict. These facilities include the Political Security and Military Intelligence Prisons, operated by [governmental actors affiliated with the Islah party](#). Detainees in these facilities are typically accused of working for the Houthis. [Some have been kept incommunicado](#), with no formal charges or legal proceedings, for periods of two to three years. Furthermore, the [Political Security Department has not complied](#) with release orders issued by the Ministry of Interior and Public Prosecution.

Houthi and STC-run detention facilities in Sana'a, Aden, and Taiz have received considerable international and local media coverage, and been subject to advocacy efforts exposing the violations that occur within. Government-run facilities in Marib, by contrast, have received less attention, likely due in part to political considerations. Nevertheless, the detainees in these lockups have been exposed to similarly brutal torture and ill-treatment, according to rights reports and cases documented by Yemeni organizations [Mwatana](#), [SAM](#), Watch4HR, and others.

The [GEE provided a detailed](#) account of the use of torture, including sexual torture, against five men and two boys at the Political Security prison in its September 2020 report: "Torture methods included beating, electrocution, suspension in painful positions, use of scorpions and snakes, fake executions, crawling on broken glass and screws, and sexual violence via burning, beating and electrocution of genitals, and brushing genitals with a broom stick...in one case they stripped a boy naked, suspended him from the ceiling by his hands, and informed him that they were going to damage his genitals to prevent him ever having intercourse again. For an hour, they beat his penis and testicles with a metal bar and electric cables, pausing only to continue their interrogation and ordering him to confess. He was left with lasting trauma and injuries to his reproductive organs which may affect his capacity to reproduce," reads the report.

The following section explores patterns and themes in arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture in Marib:

Unlucky Travelers

Many of the arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared in Marib were initially arrested while traveling through Marib, particularly to and from Sayoun in Hadramout governorate, which is home to the Sayoun airport. Forces at the al-Falaj checkpoint have been identified by [Mwatana](#) and [SAM](#) as frequent perpetrators of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance targeting travelers and passersby.

Detaining forces have used the flimsiest of justifications to arrest travelers. For example, having a last name affiliated with the Houthi movement has been sufficient to prompt detention and/or enforced disappearance, as can traveling from Sana'a or other Houthi-held areas, as per the testimony of released detainees.

Case Files: Yasseen, Sayf, and Mohammad

Yasseen – A manual laborer living in Sana'a who was detained in Marib in 2022. At a military checkpoint Yasseen was searched and soldiers found videos of Houthi religious sermons, and religious songs on his phone. He was detained by government-affiliated forces and held for days, during which time he was beaten severely. Yasseen's family enlisted the help of contacts in Marib who were able to secure his release, following which he returned to Sana'a.

Source: AMA case files

Sayf – Detained as he was applying for a passport in Marib in November 2019. He was held incommunicado in a series of unofficial lockups for two weeks before his family learned he had been transferred to the political security prison. Following his release at an undisclosed date, Sayf told SAM that during interrogations, he was variously accused of working for the Houthis, securing passports for Houthi leadership, and working for the General People's Congress. He was interrogated for four hours at a time while blindfolded, with his hands tied behind his back. Sayf told SAM that there were more than 100 prisoners detained alongside him in the political security facility, all of whom were accused of working with the Houthis, some on the basis of their last names.

Source: [SAM Long Absence Report](#)

Mohammad Mahmoud Makhbout al-Awda – Arrested in December 2016 at the al-Falaj checkpoint and forcibly disappeared for seven months. Marib authorities denied holding Mohammad, but his family learned he was being held in Marib by another released prisoner. In April 2022 his family learned that he had died in July 2017; and that his body had been stored in a refrigerator at the Marib hospital. The official cause of death was listed on the medical report as cholera. In order to receive his body, the Marib authorities placed several stipulations on his family, including: that they acknowledge Mohammad was sick before entering prison and that detention had played no role in his illness, and that he be buried with no media coverage.

Source: [SAM Long Absence Report](#)

Prisoner Exchanges

[The internationally recognized government](#) and Houthis completed the war's largest-ever prisoner swap in October 2020, brokered by the UN and overseen by the ICRC, resulting in the release of 1,061 prisoners of war. Since that time smaller scale exchanges have occurred as well, [such as an April 2021](#) case in which 21 soldiers in captivity were released by both sides.

"Most [Marib] detainees are only released as part of prisoner exchanges for prisoners of war, which is a crime in and of itself," an AMA researcher who works in Marib told DT Institute. The [GEE reported](#) in September 2020 that authorities at the Political Security Prison in Marib had told detainees they would only be released as part of prisoner exchange deals with the Houthis, regardless of the detainees' political affiliation or background, and that "almost all the former detainees from this facility interviewed by the Group were released in such prisoner exchanges."

Marib authorities' practice of releasing the arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared as part of prisoner swap deals mirrors the behavior of Houthi authorities in Sana'a. This strategy treats individuals who have experienced grave personal liberty violations as participants in the war, even though they often have no connection to the warring parties.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Over the course of the Yemeni war local conflict parties have engaged in the widespread use of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture to cement their rule and penalize dissent. These violations against personal liberty have largely gone unremedied and unpunished even as Yemeni and international rights organizations have worked tirelessly to expose them. Case files from AMA, SAM, and Watch4HR demonstrate that conflict actors continued to arbitrarily detain, forcibly disappear, and torture Yemenis today, with often disastrous consequences for victims and their families.

However, two trends highlighted in this report suggest that the outlook for personal liberty violations in Yemen is not entirely bleak.

First, the efforts of Yemen's Public Prosecutors to assert official government control over lockups run by government affiliated forces have borne some fruit. While these efforts have faced pushback from UAE-backed forces in Aden, and Islah-affiliated forces in Taiz, they have also resulted in the release of some of the arbitrarily detained, and forcibly disappeared in both areas from 2017 onwards. Notably, the public prosecutor's efforts in Aden appear to have been jumpstarted by widespread media coverage of abuses committed there against the detained and disappeared. This indicates that in certain high-profile cases, sustained publicity of personal liberty violations can spur action on the part of the internationally recognized government to improve detention conditions.

Second, researchers with AMA and SAM noted that the pace and severity of arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, and torture had decreased in recent years compared to early in the conflict, in Sana'a, Taiz, and Aden, due to a combination of local factors.

A concerted effort on the part of the international community and Yemeni organizations to reduce the fallout from personal liberty violations is critical, given these abuses continue to exert a heavy toll on victims across Yemen. The following recommendations are intended to address the lack of accountability for personal liberty violations and alleviate some of the suffering caused by these abuses:

- **Compile detailed case files of personal liberty violations to be presented to relevant international prosecutorial authorities.** YHRFL partner organizations as well other Yemeni NGOs have been carefully documenting personal liberty violations since the conflict began. This includes collecting testimony from victims, eyewitnesses, and family members, as well as archiving supporting documentation including court records, medical records, etc. In addition, there is a wealth of reliable open-source information regarding the individuals and agencies responsible for official and unofficial detention facilities across Yemen. Compiling detailed case

files for presentation to relevant international prosecutorial authorities is within the realm of the possible and could provide much-needed momentum towards holding perpetrators to account and securing redress for victims.

- **Support efforts to establish an international criminally focused investigation mechanism**, to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyze evidence, and identify victims of grave violations and crimes, including those arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared.
- **Support efforts to provide reparations and compensation to victims of personal liberty violations.**
- **Support Yemeni organizations that provide material and psychological aid to victims of personal liberty violations and their families.** The impact of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture extend far beyond the initial violation period. Released detainees often contend with a host of physical and psychological ailments resulting from detention and struggle to find employment after release. Their families suffer from acute psychological hardship, particularly in cases of enforced disappearance, as well as material hardship, borrowing money and taking on extra work to make up for the lost income resulting from their loved one's detention. Supporting the efforts of Yemeni NGOs that provide material and psychological aid to victims of personal liberty violations and their families would help mitigate the widespread damage caused by these abuses. YHRFL partner organizations that work on these issues include AMA, CSWC, al-Amal, and MDF; non-partner organizations include Mwatana, and the Yemen Organization for Combating Human Trafficking.
- **Support Yemeni organizations that provide material and psychological aid to victims of sexual violence in detention.** All local conflict parties have been documented perpetrating sexual violence against women and girls, and men and boys in detention. In addition to the physical and psychological damage that results from such abuse, victims are unlikely to be able to talk through and process their experiences upon release for fear of social stigma and further victimization. Supporting Yemeni organizations that treat released detainees who have experienced sexual violence is therefore critical to addressing this gap.
- **Raise awareness around the stigma associated with detention.** Victims of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture contend with social stigma from several sources. Those deprived of liberty on security-related pretexts can be accused, alongside their families, of being terrorists even if they are never formally charged with a crime. Women and girl releasees are sometimes shunned, and in certain cases attacked, by family members who see detention as a mark of shame. Supporting awareness-raising campaigns designed and run by Yemeni organizations to combat the stigma associated with detention could help reduce the chance that the arbitrarily detained, and forcibly disappeared are re-victimized by society upon release.



DT Institute