



Aiban Al-Jaradi, Tormented Childhood by War and Displacement

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As the conflict in Yemen moves into its ninth year, all aspects of the situation are becoming more complicated. The picture of a worn-out childhood plagued by conflict, frequent displacement, and the lack of a suitable climate for education, health, and housing illustrates the outcomes and impacts of this war.

“The living conditions of the children of Yemen would bring shame to humanity. There is no excuse for such a bleak situation in the 21st century. Wars, economic crises, and decades of backward development do not spare any girl or boy in Yemen. This suffering of children is all man-made.” With these words, Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, concluded one of his visits to Yemen and wrapped up the tragedy of children and childhood in Yemen.

On the side of the road in one of the streets of Marib city, a 12-year-old child, Aiban Al-Jaradi, works to sell prickly pears, which is a hard job for a young child like Aiban.

Aiban talks about leaving education so that he could help his family pay household expenses. He has been working for four years and moving from one street to another, selling all the goods in his “cart” so that he can continue buying and selling and making profits on a daily basis; otherwise, he will lose if he stops for a single day.

In this context, the Musaala Organization for Human Rights said in a joint statement with other organizations, “The future of Yemeni children is stolen as a result of attacks on infrastructure and education, as Yemeni children face a serious threat to their future due to ongoing attacks on educational infrastructure, as more than two million children are unable to go to school, and about 3,000 schools were destroyed or reused for military purposes.”

Aiban has many dreams like any other child, he dreams about continuing his education and entering the university, but his situation makes him unable to achieve his dream like thousands of Yemeni children. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) says in its mid-year report, “About six million children in Yemen are only one step away from famine. UNICEF emphasized that there is a need for urgent support. “According to a report by the organization in late March, more than 11 million children in Yemen are in need of humanitarian assistance, including 2.2 million suffering from malnutrition.”

According to the Education Cluster data, there are more than two million and 661 thousand Yemeni children of school age outside of school, including one million and 410 thousand girls and one million and 251 thousand boys. This percentage constitutes nearly a quarter of the



number of Yemeni children of school age, estimated at 10.8 million children. This means one out of every four children in Yemen is out of school.

Aiban is the story of a Yemeni displaced child whose living conditions forced him to work hard. As you get closer to him and see the details of his tired face and his hands that are filled with prickly pears thorns, he tries to show his courage and strength in the face of the arduous conditions he faces every day, says Nico Jafarnia, Yemen and Bahrain researcher at Human Rights Watch: “Yemen’s children are the country’s future, yet all parties to the conflict are committing widespread violations against them. Any peace agreement must include the protection of children and accountability for the numerous violations against them in the past nine years.”

As the prickly pear selling season comes to an end, Aiban tries to find another job selling a different kind of fruit because life goes on, as do his brothers' and mother's daily needs. Perseverance and tenacity reveal a small child who was forced into the street due to unfavorable circumstances.

Owing to the unfortunate circumstances and suffering endured by several Yemeni families, they prefer for their children to go to work to avoid the polarization and forced recruitment that children have been subjected to in the governorates of the Republic since the outbreak of war. Dozens of them have been killed and injured, and thousands are still suffering from psychological disturbances and trauma in the absence of rehabilitation centers. This has caused the spread of violations against children. The 2022 report of the United Nations Secretary-General on children and armed conflicts documented 1,596 grave violations against children in Yemen, including recruitment, killing and mutilation of children, sexual violence, kidnapping, and attacks on schools and hospitals, and preventing humanitarian access.

Childhood in Yemen remains a symbol of the suffering of a generation that has been exhausted by the war machine, displaced, and left in vain. Our little Aiban Al-Jaradi is one of the images of childhood in Yemen, whose suffering increases due to the absence of real solutions leading to a just peace that restores children’s rights and guarantees them a decent life away from deprivation of education, health, and a decent life.

Between the cruelty of society and the absence of the state, children remain victims of this reality that prevents them from achieving justice and opens wide doors for criminals to continue committing their crimes, and the future of the displaced generations remains fraught with dangers and uncertainty.