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# THE STORMING OF THE YEMENI WOMEN'S UNION HEADQUARTERS IN ADEN

Shape & 2024 Aleki

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# **Incident Summary**

Incident: The storming of the Yemeni Women's Union Headquarters

Location: Yemeni Women's Union Headquarters, Aden City, 12.779609838160113,

45.04148603471202.

Date: 13 May 2024 and 26 May 2024

**Time: Day Time** 

Potential responsible: General Union of Southern Women and the Southern Transitional

Council STC

## Introduction

On May 13, 2024, the Yemeni Women's Union (YWU), citizens, and news agencies shared news and images about an attack carried out by the General Union of Southern Women to take over the YWU headquarters in Aden City. News about this incident continued until May 26, 2024, when the YWU, citizens, and news agencies shared news about another incident where the General Union of Southern Women, backed by the Southern Transitional Council (STC), stormed and took over the YWU headquarters.

Yemeni Archive conducted an investigation into the incident, looking specifically at when, where, and how it occurred.

# Methodology

Yemeni Archive investigated the incident based on:

- Collecting, preserving, and analyzing a video, photos, and reports published on social media platforms, providing information about the incident.
- Verifying the location of the headquarters by matching prominent landmarks visible in the visual content with satellite imagery and initial reports of the incident.
- Verified a video from the moment of the incident.
- The Yemeni Archive held a one-hour interview with the Yemeni Women's Union. The Yemeni Women's Union shared images and videos during the interview; however, all the sources that were shared are already publicly available.

This investigation is a summary of multiple stages of verification and analysis of available open source information. The collected information covers the date, timing, location, and impacts caused by the incident. The full research methodology of Yemeni Archive is available on our website.

# **About Aden City**

Aden City is located on the southern coast of Yemen, approximately 363 kilometers from the capital, Sanaa, approximately 170 km (110 mi) east of the Bab-el-Mandeb strait, and north of the Gulf of Aden. As of 2023, Aden City had a <u>population</u> of approximately 1,080,000 residents, making it one of the largest cities in Yemen.

In 2015, both Aden and its neighboring areas in Lahj, such as Tur al-Baha, Tuban, al-Milah, and Radfan districts, were controlled by the Houthi's from <u>January 2015</u> to late March 2015. However, they were swiftly recaptured in a <u>military operation</u> backed by the United Arab Emirates in July 2015. Since then, these areas have remained under the control of the Internationally Recognized Government (IRG). Aden city has been the <u>defacto capital</u> of the IRG since the start of hostilities in early 2015 when then-President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi fled to the southwestern port city from Sanaa following its fall to the Houthis.

Aden, Lahj, Abyan and Aldhalea governorates are currently under the control of figures affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council, which assumed control of Aden in early

2018. Aden city has since experienced several bouts of intensive infighting between the Saudi-backed IRG and UAE-supported STC forces.

## **Different Actors**

#### The Southern Transitional Council

The <u>STC</u>, led by <u>Aydarus al-Zubaydi</u> and supported by the <u>United Arab Emirates</u>, is a political organization that emerged in May 2017. Initially allied against the Houthis, the STC has since engaged in both political and military rivalry with the IRG. Despite its membership in the Presidential Leadership Council starting in April 2022, the STC asserts its <u>representation</u> of southern interests and advocates for a peaceful secession of the south. <u>President Zubaydi</u> of the STC also serves as the supreme commander of the Southern Armed Forces, which include various military brigades and police units integrated within the IRG's defense and interior ministries. The STC is the only authority governing Aden, and is the party responsible for the safety of the civilians and civil society there.

#### The General Union of Southern Women

The General Union of Southern Women was announced through the <u>founding</u> <u>conference</u> held in Aden on 05 January 2024, and Nada Awbali was declared the president of the union. According to a news article by <u>Al Omana</u> website, the General Union of Southern Women is a women's association representing women from various governorates in the south. Similar to the STC, it aims to reclaim all the rights that have been deprived of them through the systematic exclusion and marginalization practiced by "the Yemeni occupation" over the past three decades.

It is an institution supported by the Southern Transitional Council, and according to <a href="news">news</a> published by Al-Sharie newspaper in 2020, the General Union of Women of the South was established based on recommendations from the Southern Transitional Council.

## The Yemeni Women Union

YWU is an independent voluntary non-governmental organization established since the 1960s. As mentioned on their About page on their <u>website</u>, YWU is a civil society organization with independent legal status, encompassing <u>23 branches</u> across various provinces across Yemen, and is not affiliated with any political faction or party.

According to their <u>website</u> they work to rehabilitate and empower women in particular and the family in general, and support capabilities to contribute effectively to sustainable development, emergencies and crises, eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, and strengthen the principle of partnership and cooperation with local, Arab and international organizations.

# What happened and When

On Monday, 13 May 2024, news and <u>images</u> were shared on <u>social media</u> showing women and men carrying a ladder, a STC flag, and a sign with the name of the General Union of Southern Women displayed outside the YWU headquarters in Aden City.

On the same day the YWU Facebook page shared a post saying that their headquarters was stormed by a group of women affiliated with the General Union of Southern Women and a group of men affiliated with the STC in the district of Sayrah. The Facebook post condemns the attack on the headquarters of the YWU and states that the attack resulted in the disruption of the essential services provided by the Union that includes the shelter house for vulnerable women, which operates independently from any political entity. The post also appeals to various government officials, urging them to intervene to protect the social fabric threatened by such an attack.



Image shared on Twitter by <u>Huda Alsarari</u> shows individuals carrying a sign with the name of the Union of Southern Women on it. Image was captured by Yemeni Archive on 13 June 2024.



The image shared on Twitter by <u>Abe News Network</u> shows the sign and the STC flag placed on the outer wall of the building. The image was captured by Yemeni Archive on 13 June 2024.

The narrative on Twitter about the incident differs slightly, as it mentions <u>Sadde Aljanoub</u>, <u>Tariq Salam</u>, and <u>Mohammed Al Nomani</u> stating the headquarters of the YWU, located in the Sayrah district was attacked by elements of the STC before being handed over to figures affiliated with what is known as the General Unions of Southern Women, which is also affiliated with the STC. On the same day of the attack <u>Aljanub Alyamaniu</u> shared a post on Facebook stating that the identification sign of the YWU was taken down and replaced with another for the Southern Women's Union.

The <u>tweets</u> were accompanied by pictures showing men and women carrying a ladder, sign, and the flag of the STC.



<u>Screenshot</u> of the STC logo, captured from the STC official page. The logo incorporates the STC flag. Captured by Yemeni Archive on 15 July 2024.

On Facebook, the narrative about the attack included criticism when <u>Salah Abed</u>, a local journalist for AFP, shared a post stating that it's a difficult time in Aden City as people are without electricity, while other groups are seeking to attack the headquarters located in the city. This narrative was also shared by YWU on their <u>Facebook</u> page when they stated in a post that in Aden people's livelihoods are deteriorating from a lack of electricity and other essential public services. In the days following the attack <u>news</u> reports were shared about the YWU, condemning the treatment its headquarters in the city of Aden had been subjected to.



Image shared by <u>Al Janub Al Yamani</u> Facebook page on 13 May 2024, shows individuals carrying a ladder and a sign in the front main gate of the YWU headquarters. Image was captured by Yemeni Archive on 13 June 2024.



The <u>image</u> shared by Salah Abed on Facebook on May 13, 2024, the day of the attack, shows a woman in the courtyard of the YWU carrying the STC flag, the image also shows a sign with the name of YWU on it. Screenshot captured by Yemeni Archive on 13 June 2024.

On 14 May 2024, a day after the incident, the General Union of Southern Women wrote a statement explaining their own narrative about the incident, the statement was shared online on 16 May 2024 by 4May news and Aden - TM, the statement addresses several grievances regarding the YWU branch in Aden. It argues that the South was once an independent state with its sovereignty and should not be subordinate to Sana'a. The statement criticizes the leadership of the YWU for not recognizing the sovereignty of the South and accuses them of exploiting Southern women's properties. It suggests that the YWU should join the Southern Women's Union instead. The statement condemns the removal of the Southern flag from the Women's Union building and calls for justice. It emphasizes the importance of Southern identity and asserts that the rightful ownership of properties must be restored to Southern women. The statement claimed that the

women of the Southern Union entered the building peacefully and respectfully on 12 May 2024, and presented what was requested to the women at the YWU branch in Aden. The request was to share the headquarters and engage in partnership and collaborative work from the building.

Additionally, Nada Awbali - who was declared the president of the General Union of the Southern Women on 05 January 2024 - claimed in an interview reported by Al Ayyam newspaper that "we went to the center of the YWU branch in Aden, which has been established since 1968, We approached the officials there with kindness, expressing a desire to share the building and work together as partners and equals. Unfortunately, they were not received well."



An image shared by <u>Hoda Al-Sarari</u> from the day of the attack the images shared on Facebook on 15 May 2024 two days after the attack. The image shows a group of people including Nada Awbali. Screenshot was captured by Yemeni Archive on 13 June 2024.

On 17 May 2024 <u>news</u> was shared online about Dr. Mahmoud bin Jiradi, the Director-General of Sayrah District, after he met with leaders of the Southern Women's Union and the YWU branch in Aden to resolve a dispute over the location of the Women's Union headquarters in the Rizmit area of Sayrah District. After listening to the

reasons for the dispute and its developments, an agreement was reached. According to Dr. Bin Jiradi's proposal, the Southern Women's Union would operate in the headquarters (the source of the dispute) for two weeks until Fatima Marisi, the head of the Yemeni Women's Union branch in Aden, returns from her medical treatment. During this period, she would meet with Nada Awbali, the head of the General Women's Union in the South, to discuss and resolve the issues between the unions with ease and understanding. Dr. Bin Jiradi confirmed this decision in front of everyone, emphasizing that Nada Awbali is responsible for all branches in the South as the head of the General Women's Union. At the end of the meeting, several photos were taken, capturing the unions together at the headquarters with Dr. Mahmoud Al-Jaradi, the Director-General of Sayrah District.



An <u>image</u> from the Dr. Mahmoud bin Jiradi meeting with Southern Women's Union and the YWU branch in Aden. The image was shared with an article shared by <u>Alnqabi Aljanubi</u> on 17 May 2024. Image was captured by Yemeni Archive on 13 May 2024.

The <u>news</u> about storming the YWU headquarter continued to be shared online the days following the incident. On 21 May 2024 the General Union of Southern Women shared a <u>Facebook post</u> saying the headquarters of the south must be restored without exception in a reference to YWU.

On 26 May 2024, YWU shared a public statement on <u>Facebook</u> reporting another attack on their headquarters in Aden City. The statement stated that the headquarters was attacked and vandalized by a group claiming to be the General Southern Women's Union under the leadership of Nada Awbali. The post states that the attackers destroyed training halls, surveillance rooms, and accommodation facilities, threatening

residents with violence. Additionally, it mentions that YWU filled a complaint with the Chief Prosecutor Office in Aden who issued an order for relevant police to intervene but when authorities were notified, an officer named Maher Abbas -an investigative officer at the Crater Police Department- allegedly disregarded instructions to intervene, allowing the unlawful actions to continue.

The YWU calls for intervention from relevant authorities, civil society organizations, human rights groups, and international humanitarian organizations to protect their historic institution and uphold women's rights in Aden. According to an Amnesty International report that was based on interviewing six members of the Yemeni Women Union, the group of women and men who carried out the attack on the headquarters also expelled the headquarters guard, replacing him with a new STC-affiliated armed guard.

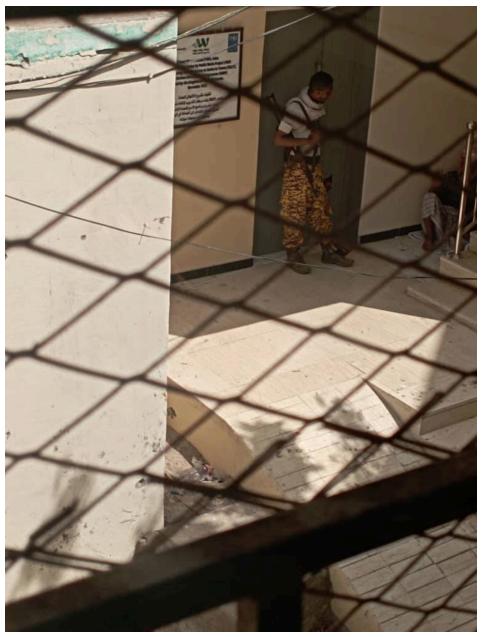


Image shared by <u>Aljanub Alyamaniu</u> Facebook page on 29 May 2024, shows a man with a machine gun standing in the front of a door inside the YWU headquarters. Part of what the man is wearing seems to be an STC military uniform, additionally, the image is most likely in the courtyard of the YWU headquarters, given the windowed iron parts that appear in most of the images taken from the second attack. Image captured by Yemeni Archive on 13 June 2024.



A screenshot of an image shared by the <u>Media Center of the Security Belt Forces</u> shows forces of what is known as the Security Belt in Aden. The uniform appears similar to the one worn by an individual in an image above from the YWU headquarters. Screenshot captured by Yemeni Archive on 16 July 2024.



A screenshot from a <u>video</u> of the second attack and published by YWU Facebook page, shows Nada Awbali - the women with the orange headscarf - present at the main gate of the YWU headquarters. Image was captured by Yemeni archive on 13 June 2024.

Social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter continued to share information about the 26 May attack. In a Facebook post, journalist Fatima Al-Aghbari called for all international and regional organizations that condemn such attacks to cease any dealings with the STC. Additionally, any support provided to what is known as the Southern Women's Union is seen as endorsing such unlawful behavior. Additionally, Together We Rise for Women and Children Care Foundation condemned the attack on the YWU in Aden, stating the attack, assault, and seizure of property by the self-proclaimed Southern Women's Union violate women's rights and the rule of law. Additionally, they called for an immediate investigation and justice for victims. They also called for protection of the YWU headquarters in Aden as essential for its continued work.

On 30 May 2024 four days after the second incident YWU shared a video on their Facebook page from the day of the attack showing women trying to force a locked door open. The comments on the post reflected conflicting views. Some expressed support for the Southern Women's Union's occupation of the building and their right to reclaim it, while others argued that historically, the building belongs to the YWU as a branch in Aden,. In Sherwin Almahra's news report, it's stated that STC members looted the

headquarters and threatened to kill female residents of the shelter, also intending to expel them.



Screenshot from a <u>video</u> shared on 30 May 2024 by YWU on their Facebook page. The Video shows a group of women trying to force open the main gate of the YWU headquarters, the video is from the second attempt to take over the headquarters. The screenshot was captured by Yemeni Archive on 14 June 2024.



Screenshots from a <u>video</u> shared on 30 May 2024 by YWU on their Facebook page. The Video shows a group of women waiting on the opposite side from the YWU headquarters. The screenshots were captured by Yemeni Archive on 14 June 2024.

On the other hand the General Union of Southern Women shared a statement on their Facebook page dated with the date of the attack, 26 May 2024. In the statement the General Union of Southern Women mentions sharing the post from their headquarters, and expresses their resolve to reclaim their rights and operate from their own building. They recount the history of their union, which was forcibly taken over by authorities in 1994. Despite attempts to engage in dialogue and share the space with the YWU, they claim to have been met with closure and intimidation. The statement reaffirms their commitment to national and international standards in protecting women's rights and empowerment. They emphasize their determination to resist deception and reclaim their rightful place, standing united as the proud women of the South. On 04 June 2024 Mukalla - a news network- shared a Facebook post reporting that the union committee of textbook printers in Aden praised the Southern Women's Union, led by Nada Awbali, for reclaiming their historic headquarters. This victory reflects their commitment to restoring the leading role of Southern women.



Screenshot of the declaration of endorsement by the Union Committee of Textbook Printers in Aden for the General Union of Southern Women. The image was shared on <u>Minasat Aleasimat Aden Alhura</u> on 02 June 2024. Screenshot was captured by Yemeni Archive on 13 June 2024.

The General Union of Southern Women received additional congratulations and support for reclaiming their headquarters, as reported by the Alngabi Aljanubi website. The article also mentioned that the STC leadership in Shabwa province, along with members of the National Dialogue Committee, visited the headquarters and expressed their support and emphasized the importance of restoring the union's assets across Southern provinces. Additionally, the Al Ayam website published a news report including a statement from the General Union of Southern Workers' Unions, in which the statement expressed support for the Southern Women's Union in reclaiming their rights taken by the Yemeni Women's Union. It also congratulated them on regaining their own building. More congratulations were posted on Facebook for the Southern Women's Union, including a post on the Minasat Aleasimat Alhura Facebook page where the preparatory committee of the Southern Women's Union in Abyan congratulated the General Union of Southern Women on successfully reclaiming the union's headquarters in Aden. Additionally, During her visit on 06 June 2024 Professor Johara Hassan Al-Qaity, the Director General of International Relations at the University of Aden and President of the Goethe Foundation for Development and Support of University Students, applauded the restoration of the headquarters of the Union of Southern Women.

On May 31, 2024, the Facebook page <u>Minasat Aleasimat Alhura</u> appears to be managed by the General Union of Southern Women because the first post and the picture of the page profile is the General Union of Southern Women logo, shared a post featuring a picture of the work permit for the Southern Women's Union.

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Screenshot shared by <u>Minasat Aleasimat Alhura</u> on their Facebook page on 31 May 2024. The image shows the work permit for the Southern Women's Union. Screenshot was captured by Yemeni Archive on 13 May 2024.

The website Alnqabi Aljanubi in a news article claimed that the YWU is illegitimate and lacks any legal status, prompting the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor to oversee the elections for the General Conference of the Southern Women's Union held in January 2024. As a result, it received official recognition and was acknowledged by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, with registration number (336), considering it a valid declaration.

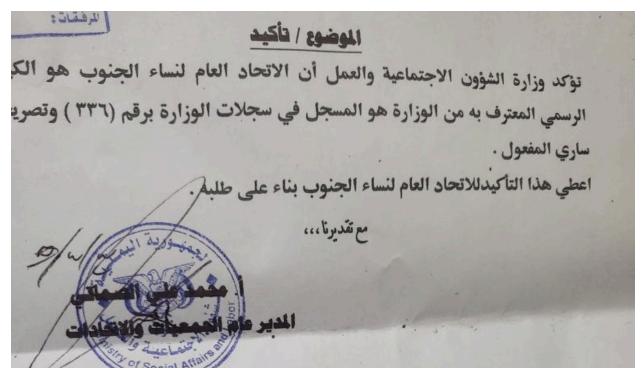


Image shared by <u>Alnqabi Aljanubi</u> on 20 May 2024. The image shows that the Southern Women's Union has received official recognition and was acknowledged by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. Screenshot was captured by Yemeni Archive 14 June 2024.

However, it's important to note that on 11 May 2024, two days before the first attempt to control the YWU headquarters, Nada Oubli, president of the General Union of Southern Women, and other union executives met with President Aidarous Qasim Al-Zubaidi, who leads the STC. During the meeting, Al-Zubaidi received a detailed briefing on the union's initiatives aimed at enhancing the status of southern women and reinforcing their role in shaping the future of the southern state.

Similar <u>incidents</u> have occurred in Yemen but in other areas. On 15 October 2022, the women's wing of the Houthi intelligence, known as the Zainabiyat, stormed the headquarters of the YWU in Ibb Governorate. The news reported that the headquarters was converted into private housing for these elements after expelling dozens of women who were participating in a training program on craft skills for the poorest families. In addition, a <u>news</u> report on 27 September 2022, stated that the Houthi group dismissed Professor Fathia Abdullah, the President of the Yemeni Women's Union, and appointed Zainabiyya Ghada Abu Talib as the new President of the Union.

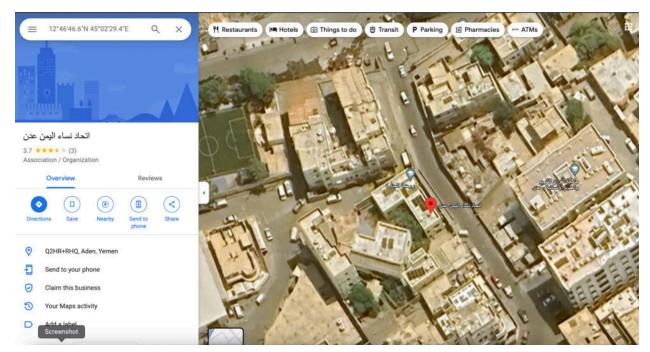
The attack on the headquarters of the YWU by the STC is just one more incident in a series of violations occurring in the region. In similar incidents the STC, through its affiliated members, stormed and took over civil society buildings. On the late night of February 28, 2023, armed individuals targeted the <u>Yemeni Journalists Syndicate</u>

headquarters in Al-Tawahi, Aden. They replaced the syndicate's sign and imposed an armed perimeter around the building. Previously in June 2021, <a href="mailto:armed\_forces">armed\_forces</a> affiliated with the STC seized control of the headquarters of the official Yemeni news agency (<a href="Saba">Saba</a>) after storming it and expelling its employees. In the same month, militants associated with the STC raided the offices of the Al-Thawra newspaper, after having taken over the 14th October newspaper in August 2019. All of which were then handed over to entities affiliated with the STC.

Throughout the discussion on social media, Yemeni Archive analyzed various aspects surrounding the attack on the YWU headquarters. From analyzing images, video, and reports, evidence points to the identification of individuals present such as Nada Awbali, helping to understand the context and implications of the incident.

## Geolocation

According to open source information shared about the attack, Almasdaronline provided the exact address of the YWU headquarters in an article about the first attack. With the images and a video shared online about the two attacks, Yemeni Archive compared these images with satellite images. By searching in Google Maps, Yemeni Archive was able to determine the location of the YWU headquarters at coordinates: 12.779609838160113, 45.04148603471202. Additionally, when searching for the YWU address, Yemeni Archive found it listed as being behind the Public Water and Sanitation Corporation in Aden's Crater district.



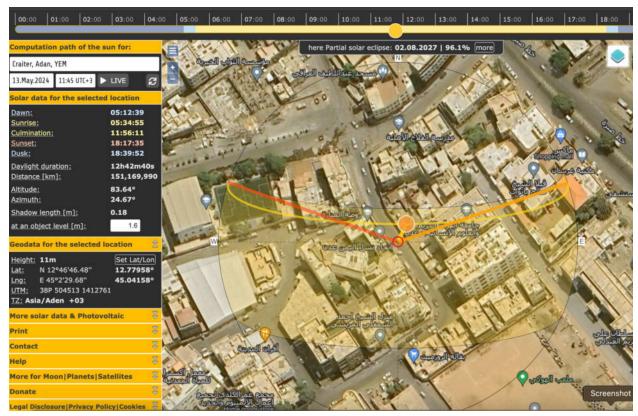
Screenshot from google map showing the YWU headquarters <u>Source</u>. Image was captured by Yemeni Archive on 15 June 2024.



An image from Google Earth from 04 June 2023 of the YWU headquarters. This image matched the images shared on Twitter by <u>Huda Alsarari</u> on 15 May 2024 and <u>Abe News Network</u> on 14 May 2024. Corresponding visible features led the Yemeni Archive to determine that the location matches those present in the documented scenes of the incident.

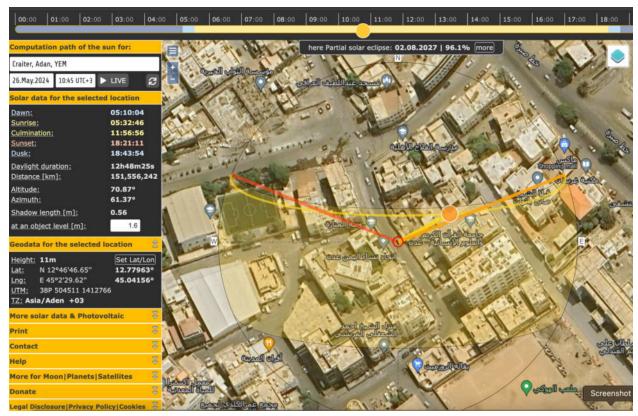


Screenshots from a <u>video</u> shared by YWU on their Facebook page on 30 May 2024, alongside a screenshot of the headquarters on Google Earth from 04 June 2023. Together these images illustrate the scene of the second attack. Captured by Yemeni Archive on 15 June 2024.



Screenshot from <u>SunCalc</u> showing the position of the sun and shadows at the front of the YWU headquarters around 11:45 Yemeni time on 13 May 2024, captured by Yemeni Archive by 18 June 2024.

Based on the <u>images</u> that were shared on social media, along with the position of the sun in the captured images at the attack, it can be concluded that the incident likely occurred between 10:45 AM and 12 noon local time of 13 May 2024.



Screenshot from <u>SunCalc</u> showing the position of the sun and shadows at the front of the YWU headquarters around 10:45 Yemeni time on 26 May 2024, captured by Yemeni Archive by 18 June 2024.

Based on the <u>video</u> shared by YWU from the second attack on the YWU headquarters, along with the position of the sun in the captured images at the time of the incident, it can be concluded that the incident likely occurred between 10:45 and 11:15 local time in the morning of 26 May 2024.

## Damage

YWU on their <u>Facebook page</u> and other <u>social media</u> accounts and news reports claimed that during the second attack on 26 May 2024 on the headquarters of the YWU, its property was destroyed, documents were confiscated, and all its halls, screens, and surveillance cameras were smashed. Yemeni Archive could not verify these claims due to the lack of shared visuals online.

## Conclusion

Through the information described above, the Yemeni Archive was able to confirm that the YWU headquarters in Aden City was attacked by women members of the General Union of Southern Women and STC members. The first attack occurred around noon on 13 May 2024, and the second attack occurred around 10:45 on 26 May 2024. Based on the analysis above, the Yemeni Archive can confirm the presence of at least one armed member affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council in the second attack.

According to Open-source information collected by Yemeni Archive, YWU were able to reenter the building and <u>continue working</u> from their offices. However the Southern Women's Union continues to occupy part of the building.