

# Amnesty International concerned with human rights deterioration in Yemen

The independent international organization concerned with human rights has been keeping a close eye on Yemen lately while issuing several statements in the last two weeks condemning violations committed by the government against human rights.

Summarized by Nadia Al-Sakkaf

SANA'A, Sept 7 — In the name of security, the Yemeni authorities are rolling back human rights gains — with terrible consequences for the people of Yemen, says Amnesty International's latest report on Yemen 'security at what price?'

AI has been surveying the violations against human rights in the last few months and concluded that the government has increasingly resorted to repressive and illegal methods.

Hundreds if not thousands of people suspected of links to Al-Qaeda or armed Islamist groups have been arrested and subjected to a wide range of abuses, including enforced disappearance, prolonged detention without charge, torture and unfair trials.

In the conflict with the Houthis in the northern Sa'ada region, hundreds, possibly thousands, of civilians have been killed, many as a result of apparently indiscriminate attacks, and over a quarter of a million people have been forced to flee their homes. In the south, security forces have allegedly targeted for killings people prominent in the Southern Movement and have killed or injured hundreds of protesters during peaceful demonstrations. Many suspected of links to the Houthis or the Southern Movement have been arbitrarily detained and jailed after unfair trials.

Those speaking out against government policies or human rights violations have also been targeted, among them journalists, human rights defenders and lawyers.

Legislation and specialized courts created to counter terrorism have been used to imprison even those who merely discuss what is happening in Sa'ada or the south.

And the main security fear for many Yemenis is to be caught up in the government's sweeping responses to the challenges it faces in the south and north, which are often described as counterterrorism operations.

AI argues that international pressure on Yemen intensified after 25 December 2009 when a Nigerian man, said to have been trained by Al-Qaeda in Yemen, apparently tried to blow up a

US airliner bound for Detroit. The US government quickly expanded military and intelligence co-operation with the Yemeni authorities, and in early 2010 announced a USD 155 million security package for Yemen, with around USD 35 million earmarked for the country's Special Operations Forces to carry out counter-terrorism operations.

Moreover, the largely uncritical international support for Yemen's security operations has facilitated the government's resort to unlawful methods. It is high time the international community put a different kind of pressure on the Yemeni authorities and other governments involved in Yemen — pressure based on the understanding that by violating human rights, security is jeopardized, not enhanced.

## Responding to Al-Qaeda

In July 2007, a suicide bomber killed eight Spanish tourists and two Yemeni drivers accompanying them in Marib. In September 2008, a suicide bomb attack against the US embassy in Sana'a killed at least 16 people, including six attackers. In March 2009, a bomb killed four South Korean tourists and their Yemeni guide in Hadramout. In June 2010, an attack on a security forces' building in Aden killed seven security officers, three women and a child.

These and other lethal attacks have been carried out by militants suspected by the government of being affiliated to al-Qaeda and other Islamist armed groups in Yemen.

Amnesty International is concerned that the Yemeni authorities are failing to protect people from such attacks while ensuring that any measures it takes do not violate human rights and that they increasingly resort to abusive measures.

Hundreds, possibly thousands, of people have been detained for long periods without charge or trial. Some have disappeared. Some have been tortured. Some have been condemned to death or long prison terms after unfair trials before the Specialized Criminal Court, set up in 1999 to deal with state security offences.

"An extremely worrying trend has developed where the Yemeni authorities, under pressure from the US and others to fight Al-Qaeda, and Saudi Arabia to deal with the Houthis, have been citing national security as a pretext to deal with opposition and stifle all criticism," said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International's Director for the Middle East and North Africa Program.

Since 2009 the security forces have killed more than 100 people in operations allegedly targeting "terrorists". In some cases, people were said to have been killed during exchanges of fire between militants and security forces



Southern Movement mass demonstration, 2009. Many people in the south believe they are subject to discrimination by the government and there is growing support for secession from the north. Tens of thousands of people have engaged in mass protests since August 2007. Red, white, blue and black flags of the former PDYR flutter from rooftops, and the colors feature heavily in graffiti on walls, houses and shop fronts.

trying to apprehend them.

In others, the security forces appear to have made no attempt to make an arrest, or used excessive force. No judicial investigations are known to have been initiated to establish whether or not the use of lethal force by security forces in any of these cases was justified and lawful.

## Conflict in Sa'ada

Pictures of the aftermath of the conflict in Sa'ada reveal a devastated region. Houses and apartment blocks, market places and mosques, petrol stations and businesses, schools and health centers — no type of building appeared to have been spared.

Several displaced people described to Amnesty International attacks that indicated the use of cluster bombs. A man who survived the bombing of a market in Razih on 7 October said: "I saw two planes with parachutes coming down [from them]. People said and thought it was aid. They took about three minutes to come down... Then the market turned to a screaming area, smoke, shrapnel, dust, stones and broken windows everywhere..."

Others described repeated attacks on residential areas. A man who witnessed the bombing in Razih of two houses of the Abu Taleb family on 30 December 2009, in which up to 45 people were killed, said: "We were taking the victims out — 14 women and 16 children were killed."

Another group described the bombing of Bani Ma'an market on about 12 December 2009, which killed 80 to 90 people. One of them said: "You couldn't tell human flesh from animal meat."

The lack of access to Sa'ada meant that Amnesty International delegates in Yemen in March 2010 could not verify such accounts at first hand, although

collectively the accounts they received provided strong evidence of the nature of the recent bombardments by Yemeni and Saudi Arabian forces.

International humanitarian law, which applies during armed conflicts, forbids the targeting of civilian objects, such as houses, as well as attacks that fail to discriminate between military and civilian targets, or are disproportionate in their consequences for civilians.

## Muzzling free speech

The government has become increasingly intolerant of the independent media and any criticism. Journalists, editors and media proprietors have been detained, held incommunicado, ill-treated and jailed on spurious charges after unfair trials.

Security forces have attacked and raided newspaper offices and television stations, and shot at demonstrators peacefully protesting against repression of free speech. Newspapers have been suspended and news websites blocked.

Freedom of expression is guaranteed

by Yemen's Constitution. However, this right is undermined by restrictive laws and practices, particularly the 1990 Press and Publications Law, and by the Specialized Press and Publications Court set up in May 2009. The court appears to be aimed at suppressing dissent by fast-tracking cases brought against government critics.

Among many victims of the crack-down on free speech is Muhammad al-Maqalih, a journalist and Socialist Party member. He disappeared in September 2009 for four months. He later told Amnesty International that he had been snatched by armed state agents in plain clothes from a street in Sana'a and then severely beaten "all over my body until I was bleeding and lost consciousness... I was unable to move for about 10 days."

Muhammad al-Maqalih was subsequently charged with broadcasting information against the security forces

and defending Houthi supporters.

Such charges are punishable by death. He was then referred to the Specialized Criminal Court. In April

2010 he was told that he also faced prosecution for "defaming the President" before the Specialized Press and Publications Court, apparently for articles he wrote in 2005.

In March 2010 Amnesty International delegates in Yemen were twice refused admission to the Specialized Criminal Court to attend sessions of Muhammad al-Maqalih's trial. Around a week later, Muhammad al-Maqalih was released and on 20 May Yemen's President halted all legal proceedings against him. However, Amnesty International is concerned that the charges against

him were not dropped, so the threat of trial and punishment continues to hang over him.

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# Muslim Women's Shura Council: Female genital cutting: Harmful and un-islamic

**The Muslim Women's Shura Council is a global and inclusive council of Muslim women scholars, activists, and specialists. The Council endeavors to connect Islamic principles to society's most pressing issues and develop holistic strategies for creating positive social change. In the following statement, the Shura Council condemns Female Genital Cutting as a harmful and un-Islamic practice and suggests ways to eliminate it. In doing so, the Council is in accordance with the rising religious consensus on the issue, the views of the international human rights community, and published medical research.**

**F**emale Genital Cutting (FGC) is a broad and somewhat problematic label that describes the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. Unlike comparable practices that are undertaken in the medical context, such as genital plastic surgeries and non-elective genital modification for intersex infants, FGC describes procedures performed on a minor female for traditional or cultural reasons in non-medical contexts. This Shura Council statement uses The World Health Organization (WHO) criteria for the definition of FGC.

The World Health Organization classifies FGC into four major types, based on severity of excision. FGC, therefore, describes a varied range of practices, including the following: slight pricking or nicking of the clitoral hood; hoodectomy (excision of the clitoral hood); clitoridectomy (excision of the clitoris); the excision of the clitoris and labia minora and majora; and infibulation (suturing) with excision of the external genitalia.

Commonly cited reasons for the practice include the faulty beliefs that

**Extensive religious, scholarly, and judicial consensus exists on all forms of FGC, deeming it both un-Islamic and in violation of children's and women's human rights as currently defined by the international community.**

FGC is practiced openly in 28 different African countries, as well as secretly in parts of the Middle East, Europe, Australia, and the United States. Over 130 million women worldwide have been affected by some form of FGC, and three million girls are at risk every year. Most children are subjected to FGC between the ages of four and ten years. However, there has been a recent downward shift in the age of victims, as parents try to reduce trauma to their children, avoid government interference, or forestall resistance from the children themselves. Some women who escaped FGC during childhood may later undergo FGC as a prerequisite for marrying into a community.

FGC has been widely condemned by political and religious authorities and is banned by a broad network of local, national, and international laws. Countries with national laws against FGC include Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Djibouti, Ghana, Great Britain, Guinea, Guinea, Kenya, Niger, Senegal, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, and Uganda have declared their commitment to eradicating the practice. The WHO, United Nations Children's Fund, and United Nations Population Fund have issued joint statements against FGC, recognizing it as a major human rights violation against girls and women. Major international treaties that ban the practice include Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Convention on the Rights of the Child. Regional treaties that forbid the practice include The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (the Banjul Charter) and its Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. High-level Islamic and Christian religious scholars from around the world have denounced

FGC with legal opinions (fatawa). A 2005 report entitled, "Children in Islam: Their Care, Development and Protection," issued by UNICEF and the International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research at Al-Azhar University, also strongly condemns the practice.

## FGC is harmful

FGC procedures are often performed in unsterile environments and with little or no anesthesia. Although all FGC procedures carry health risks, infibulation (suturing) with excision, which accounts for 10% of all FGC cases in Africa, is by far the most dangerous to children and women.

Medical consequences of FGC include, but are not limited to, the following: death through shock and/or excessive bleeding; infection; sepsis; urine retention; ulceration of the genital region; injury to adjacent genital tissue; scarring; infertility; cysts; painful sexual intercourse; increased risk of transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS; and a range of resulting psychological and psychiatric problems.

In areas of the world where medical facilities are ill-equipped or inaccessible, children who develop uncontrolled bleeding or infection die within hours of the first incision. Women who have undergone FGC are significantly more likely to die during childbirth and give birth to a stillborn child. In fact, FGC-practicing regions have the world's highest maternal and infant mortality rates.

Research suggests that FGC can be eliminated very rapidly if communities themselves decide to do so. Unfortunately, FGC continues to endure because of cultural and political reasons and is often fallaciously justified on religious grounds.

## FGC is un-Islamic

Muslim proponents of FGC often try to justify it on the basis of religion and the practice is widespread in several Muslim-majority countries. According to a UNICEF report based on Demographic and Health Surveys, FGC is most prevalent in the following countries: Guinea (99% prevalence in 1999); Egypt (97% rate of prevalence among ever-married women in 2003); Mali (92% percent in 2001); and northern Sudan (90% prevalence in 2000). Somalia and Djibouti are estimated to have prevalent rates of around 90%. FGC is also common in several Christian-majority countries in Africa including Ethiopia, Kenya, and The Central African Republic (CAR). In Burkino Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Niger, Muslim women are more likely than Christian women to have undergone FGC. However, in Kenya and Tanzania, the reverse is true, with a higher percentage of Christian women than Muslim women undergoing FGC. Exposure is also determined by ethnicity, locale, and education.

This diversity stems from the fact that FGC is a social and cultural practice, not a religious one. It predates the birth of both Islam and Christianity. Origins of the practice are unclear; however, it is generally traced to Pharaonic Egypt, based on evidence found on mummies. FGC is virtually absent in many Muslim-majority countries, including Iran and Saudi Arabia, where it can be found mainly among immigrant populations. It is performed by Christians, Muslims, and Jews, as well as by members of non-Abrahamic religions in the areas where it is common.

FGC as it is currently practiced has been overwhelmingly condemned by religious authorities and rendered illegal by government statutes and international treaties. Based on every single source guiding Islamic ethics, it is clear that FGC is unjustifiable on Islamic grounds. These sources include the Qur'an, the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (hadith), the objectives and principles of Muslim religious law (maqasid al-shari'a), religious consensus (Ijma), legal opinions (fatwas), and analogical deduction (qiyas).

## FGC contradicts the Holy Qur'an

The Qur'an does not specifically mention female genital cutting. However, the Qur'anic messages of health, justice, and compassion, which permeate the holy text, clearly contradict the practice of FGC. Several other Qur'anic verses strongly condemn acts that negatively affect the human body (2:195; 4:119; 30:30), as FGC clearly does. Furthermore, the Qur'an promotes mutual pleasure during marital sexual intercourse (2:187 and 30:21), which is severely limited by FGC.

According to the Qur'an, humans were created in "the best stature" (96:4). Therefore, the human body is to be left as it was created by God, unless there is an acceptable reason for interfering with it. "Tradition" is not an acceptable reason, as the Qur'an strongly condemns those who blindly follow harmful traditions:

But when they are told, "Follow what God has bestowed from on high," some answer, "Nay, we shall follow [only] that which we found our forefathers believing in and doing." Why, even if their forefathers did not use their reason at all, and were devoid of all guidance? (2: 170).

Islam forbids all harmful and destructive cultural practices. One relevant example is female infanticide, which was "traditional" to pre-Islamic Arabia but came to be banned under Islam. The Qur'anic injunction against female infanticide and hurting innocents, therefore, is worth repeating here: *"and when the girl child who was buried alive shall be asked 'for what sin was she killed'"* (89: 8-9)

## FGC contradicts the prophet's example and words (Hadith)

There is no mention of any female members of the Prophet's household being cut, whereas there is evidence that his two grandsons, al-Hassan and al-Hussein, were circumcised at the age of seven days.

The Prophet was exemplary in his kindness and gentleness towards all members of his family and is known to have said, "Whoever becomes the



A billboard in Cairo says "No to female circumcision."

and author of Fiqh-us-Sunnah, has debunked as un-authentic every hadith concerning female circumcision.

However, even if one were to entertain the possibility that this particular hadith is authentic, it does not justify FGC, because it does not encourage the practice, but instead curbs it: the Prophet is advising against cutting a woman's genitalia severely enough to harm her and her relations with her husband. All but the most symbolic forms of FGC would be banned on the basis of this supposedly sympathetic hadith alone, even if it were authentic.

According to the International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research at Al-Azhar University, "the use of the general term 'Sunnah Circumcision' [for FGC] is nothing but a form of deceit to misguide people and give the impression that the practice is Islamic."

## FGC is not supported by legal consensus (Ijma) or legal opinions (Fatwa)

There is no consensus within the four classical fiqh schools on FGC. Classical Islamic scholars who mention female circumcision allowed cutting only the uppermost skin of the clitoral prepuce. Therefore, Islam amounted to a

scholarship has been wearing down the cultural walls of FGC.

In a global 2006 conference, an impressive array of high-level Islamic religious scholars from around the world declared FGC to be both contrary to Islam and an attack on women. Among the scholars present were Egypt's two top Islamic clerics: Dr. Mohammed Sayed Tantawi, the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, the foremost theological institute in the Sunni Muslim world, and Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa. Other participants included Hamdi Mahmoud Zakzouk (the minister of religious affairs in Egypt), Sultan Abdelkader Mohamed Humad of Djibouti, and Sultan Ali Mirah Hanfary of Ethiopia, as well as distinguished scholars from Somalia, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Eritrea, Nigeria, Djibouti, Morocco, and Turkey. Prominent religious scholar Dr. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who had previously been ambivalent on the issue, noted that the Qur'an forbids the mutilation of God's creation and unequivocally declared, "We are on the side of those who ban this practice"

In 2009, Egypt's Dār al-Iftā', the international flagship for Islamic legal research, released an extensive statement that denounced "female circumcision" as a harmful cultural rite: "Anyone who is acquainted with the reality of the matter cannot speak except in favor of its prohibition."

In January 2010, a group of thirty-four West African Muslim scholars and clerics assembled for the purpose of issuing a fatwa against female genital cutting. Other prominent scholars who have spoken against FGC include Sheikh Sayyid Sabiq, Sheikh Mohammad Arafah, Sheikh Shaltout, Sheikh Abubakar Aljazaary, Dr. Su'ad Saleh, and Dr. Selim al-Awwa.

Currently, religious scholars worldwide – including those in Egypt, Iraqi Kurdistan, Somalia, Gambia, and Kenya, to name a few – are working alongside health professionals and social workers to eradicate FGC.

## FGC cannot be supported by analogy (Qiyas)

Proponents of FGC sometimes try to justify it by using qiyas, the Islamic legal tradition of analogy, arguing that FGC is analogous to male circumcision and therefore Islamic. However, FGC is not analogous to male circumcision for the following reasons:

1. As explained above, FGC has no basis in Islamic texts, in stark contrast to male circumcision.

2. Unlike male circumcision, FGC is practiced only by some Muslim communities, and even these disagree on the extent and parameters of the cutting. Had FGC been as connected to Islam as male circumcision, the extent of cutting would have been as clearly defined and the practice would have been equally widespread.

3. FGC cannot be compared to circumcision because what is cut in males is skin that has no essential function, whereas in females, functional organs are often removed and modified.

4. There are proven medical benefits to male circumcision, but absolutely

no benefits have been reported for FGC – on the contrary, only harm. For example, published medical research suggests that male circumcision is protective against STDs, including HIV/AIDS. In stark contrast, FGC is directly correlated with the spread of STDs, including HIV/AIDS; it has been proven to play significant role in actually facilitating the transmission of HIV infection through numerous mechanisms.

In fact, according to Dr. Su'ad Saleh of Al-Azhar University, FGC resembles not male circumcision but "the custom of burying girls alive, before the advent of Islam."

**FGC contradicts the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (maqasid al-shari'a):** According to scholarly consensus, the six objectives and principles of Muslim religious law (Shari'a) include the protection and promotion of religion (al-din), life (al-nafs), mind (al-'aql), family (al-nasl), wealth (al-mal), and dignity (al-'ird). FGC violates at least five of these principles:

- The Protection of Life: FGC harms infants, girls, and women, endangering their lives and the lives of their future children.
- The Protection of Mind: FGC harms girl's minds by undermining their mental and psychosexual health, causing psychosis and trauma.
- The Protection of Family: FGC prevents the proper fulfillment of conjugal relations and precludes a mutually pleasurable sexual relationship between a husband and wife. Medical evidence clearly indicates that healthy sexual relationships promote health, stress relief, stronger immune systems, better sleep, and even longer life. In contrast, FGC precludes these health benefits and has been linked to infertility and divorce.
- The Protection of Dignity: FGC harms women's dignity, condemning them to a life of serial infections and intimate scars. Disfiguring genitalia, on the unproven assumption that it prevents promiscuity, denies humans their divine right to free will and dignity.
- The Protection of Religion: In many cases, suturing and scars make it impossible for the cut female to attain ritual cleanliness (tahara), denying her the right to worship. The unnecessary health problems caused by FGC prevent a woman from enjoying the two blessings the Prophet has praised: "health and free time for doing good."

## 4U

### Join the campaign

As a part of its ongoing Jihad Against Violence campaign, WISE and partners have launched a campaign to eradicate FGC by providing religious education against the practice, as well as financial incentives and replacement economic activities for those currently performing FGC within the community.

For more information about current campaign visit <http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/currentissues/femalegenitalcutting>.



father of a girl, he should neither hurt her nor treat her with contempt." Speaking in one of his daughters, the Prophet noted, "[she] is a part of my body, and I hate what she hates to see, and what hurts her, hurts me."

Several hadith, the authenticity of which cannot be confirmed, mention female genital cutting. The hadith most commonly used by proponents of FGC is the following:

Um Atiyyat al-Ansariyyah said: "A woman used to perform circumcision in Medina. The Prophet (pbuh) said to her: 'Do not cut too severely as that is better for a woman and more desirable for a husband'."

This is considered a "weak" hadith and can be found in only one of the six hadith collections generally accepted as authentic. Therefore, this hadith is not suitable for legal argumentation. In addition, there is also a great deal of contention as to its wording and interpretation. Sayyid Sabiq, renowned scholar

regulation and curbing of a pre-existing practice. In keeping with this curbing, currently the majority of Muslims do not practice any form of female genital cutting.

In accordance with the principle of protecting life and in confirmation of the important hadith, "there should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm," Islamic law forbids any attack on the human body, including any form of corporal harm or sexual assault. It is likely that classical scholars who called FGC permissible (mubaah) were not aware of its harm, because only a cultural practice that does not hurt an individual or the society can be called permissible under Islamic law. With the increase in scientific and medical knowledge on the effects of FGC on children, women, and families, extensive scholarly consensus has begun to form among contemporary scholars. Numerous learned fatwas have been issued against the practice worldwide, and an increasing tide of Islamic



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## Words of Wisdom



Many countries hold elections. Even when these are not rigged, they tend to cement the old patron-clientele relations in a new grab. The reason is that the people in power use their connections (and state funds, media, bureaucracy, etc.) to achieve the election results they want. The result is that they create docile parliaments. Elections thus end up enabling those in power to hold on to it.

Prof. Abdulaziz Al-Saqqaf,  
(1951 - 1999)  
Founder of Yemen Times

OUR  
OPINIONKeeping Ramadan's  
real spirit all year round

**P**reparations for Ramadan start almost one month ahead of its beginning. Days go fast and soon we are through with this month and all it meant to Muslims worldwide.

Regular life in Yemen is greatly disturbed during this month because Yemenis would rather stay up all night eating and sleep until after noon without much work being done. Unfortunately, in Yemen the month is associated with lots of eating, extra TV hours, no productivity, fighting and crazy traffic between three until the early morning hours.

On the other hand, Ramadan also brings charity, social gatherings, religious commitment and reminds Yemenis of the hungry and the poor.

If only we could take the positive spirit of Ramadan into our daily life throughout the year and continue the sense of compassion and charity.

For many poor families this month is a true blessing because their lives improve. Once this month comes to an end, a drastic transformation in people's behavior takes place and they forget how sympathetic they were with the poor, and how friendly they became with their neighbors and family.

Let's celebrate Eid with the resolution to continue the good spirit of Ramadan beyond this month. It's not difficult because if we have enjoyed doing it for one whole month why not more?

Also we don't need to limit the spirit of Ramadan locally or among Muslims. Just like there is the Christmas spirit that touches people all around the world, why not have a Muslim peace calling for kindness and extended giving to all mankind regardless of religion or origin.

Keeping Ramadan alive in our hearts and around the world, why not?

Nadia Al-Sakkaf

By overthrowing regional order,  
US unleashed a genie

By: Paul Salem  
The National

**T**he Sunni-Shiite tensions have prolonged the conflict in Iraq, caused sectarian clashes in Lebanon and insurgency in Yemen, but also stand-offs in Bahrain, Kuwait and parts of Saudi Arabia.

The US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 changed the geostrategic outlines of the Middle East. It brought a massive western army into the region with an ambitious agenda of regime-change, toppled a major Arab state that had served as a buffer to Iranian and Turkish power for most of the 20th century, and unleashed sharp ethnic and sectarian tensions that reverberated around the region. Although the effects of the Iraq war on the region are still unfolding, some consequences are already irreversible.

The initial justification for the invasion of Iraq was posed as defensive and linked to the threat of weapons of mass destruction and the purported Iraqi support for al Qaeda. When these reasons proved empty, the justification was cast in wider and more aggressive terms: a push for regime change and forced democratisation in order to transform the Middle East.

The unspoken model was previous American experiences in Europe and Asia, where the toppling of hostile regimes (Nazi Germany, imperial Japan and the Soviet Union) had led to pro-western transformations in governments from Berlin to Tokyo,

and many capitals in between.

Needless to say, American ambitions in the Middle East did not pan out as planned. The political situation in Iraq did not coalesce as in post-war Germany and Japan or post-collapse Russia, with the rapid rise of a western-oriented national leadership. Rather, politics deteriorated into prolonged internal conflict and paralysis.

Those neighbours of Iraq that were targeted for regime change, Syria and Iran, did not fall in line after the American invasion, but co-operated intensely to undermine the occupation and try to force the US withdrawal. Arab allies of the US who panicked at Bush administration pressure for rapid democratisation learnt that they could get by with only cosmetic reforms, and that the US would back off from its agenda once it realised that Islamist parties would be the likely winners.

Far from transforming the region into an oasis of American influence led by pro-western liberal elites on the western and central European model, the war strengthened radicals in the region and in places reinforced the hold of authoritarian regimes.

In terms of regional order, the collapse of Iraq heralded the end of the Arab order that had prevailed precariously since the 1950s. This order had been informed by the ideology of Arab nationalism, institutionalised in the League of Arab States, and strengthened under the leadership of the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser.

The separate peace between Egypt and

Israel in 1979 was a strong blow to this order, as was the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait a decade later. But the toppling of the Iraqi state in 2003 marked the transformation of Iraq from a state protecting the borders of the Arab order to an arena of regional influence and competition.

Although Egypt and Saudi Arabia are struggling to preserve Iraq within the "Arab order", the country is at the centre of an emerging regional order which includes strong roles for Iran and Turkey in addition to the Arab states.

The toppling of Iraq also changed the thematics of Middle East politics. Although the Arab-Israeli conflict remained important, the issue of a rising Iran and the re-ignition of Sunni-Shiite tension emerged as two new themes.

With regard to the Arab-Israel conflict, friends of Israel had led the charge for the American invasion of Iraq. Israel was rid of the strongest Arab threat against it, but it ended up facing a new and larger threat in the shape of an empowered and nuclearising Iran, commanding a semi-imperial zone of influence stretching through Iraq, Syria and southern Lebanon, and reaching all the way to Gaza.

With Iraq gone and Iranian influence unleashed, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and other Arab states have sought to revive the peace process and resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to pull Damascus away from Tehran and block Iranian exploitation of the issue. These attempts failed in the face

of the Bush administration and Israeli interest, although all eyes are now on Barack Obama's fresh efforts to revive talks. For most Arab leaders, since the Iraq war the potential threat from Iran has replaced the Arab-Israeli conflict as the main cause for concern.

Whereas Sunni dominance of the Arab world had been uncontested for centuries, the emergence of a Shiite-led state in Baghdad, the dominant position of Hizbollah in Lebanon, and the growing influence of Iran in the Middle East, has raised region-wide sectarian tensions.

These tensions not only fuelled the prolonged conflict in Iraq, brief sectarian clashes in Lebanon and insurgency in Yemen, but have also led to serious Sunni-Shiite stand-offs in Bahrain, Kuwait and parts of Saudi Arabia. The Iraq war unleashed a genie that had lain relatively dormant, and Sunni-Shiite tension is likely to define much of the politics of the next few decades.

The Iraq war did indeed bring about a new Middle East, but not the one that the neo-conservatives of the Bush administration had envisioned. The leaders and peoples of the region, left with the consequences of this war, must grapple with its outcomes and effects, and look for ways to build regional stability and cooperation in the face of fast-moving events.

Paul Salem is the director of the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut.

## Yemen's friends need to be honest

By: Christoph Wilcke  
Human Rights Watch

**F**riends of Yemen is a group established in January at an international meeting of concerned states in London. This members, consisting of Gulf and key Western states in addition to representatives of intergovernmental institutions, need to address Yemen's human rights problems honestly if they want to assist its people and address the threats emanating from that troubled Arabian country.

Yemen's prime minister, Ali Mujawar, on March 21 described his country's expectations from this meeting in purely economic terms. He hopes for "an international fund for development in Yemen" to tackle "poverty and unemployment in addition to ... electricity, road, health, water and education." Mujawar also wants to increase Yemeni labor in the Gulf markets.

The London meeting designated "economy and governance" as one priority for Friends of Yemen, but that alone will accomplish little unless the group also addresses the second priority, "justice and rule of law." If Yemen's friends don't tie economic assistance to improvements in the country's rapidly deteriorating human rights conditions, they will have let the Yemeni people down.

Under international scrutiny, President Ali Abdullah Saleh in February agreed on a truce with the northern Huthi rebels, ending the sixth round of fighting there in five years. He has also offered to hold talks with southern protesters, and to pursue Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula more vigorously. These actions seem to have bought silence from Yemen's donors and allies even though serious human rights violations have escalated.

Yemen's government has shown its intolerance for criticism with heavy-handed

repression of the media after they criticized the government's conduct of the war against the Huthis and its handling of southern protests. Last May, and again in January, government troops in Aden fired on the headquarters of Yemen's largest-circulation and oldest independent newspaper, al-Ayyam, and arrested the editor, Hisham Bashraheel. In September, security forces brazenly abducted Muhammad al-Maqalib, online editor for the Socialist Party organ, and denied for months that they were holding him. He is now charged with "undermining the unity" of Yemen. In mid-March, government agents confiscated Al Jazeera and al-Arabiyya satellite channels' broadcasting equipment. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and UK Foreign Minister David Miliband praised the Yemeni delegation at the January meeting for honestly broaching the country's challenges. The steady repression of dissent tells a different tale.

To prevent future abuses, there is a serious need to investigate human rights abuses in Yemen and hold those responsible to account. Next week, in a new report, Human Rights Watch will detail alleged violations of the laws of war by both Huthi and government forces during their latest fighting in Sa'da.

Each of the five previous truces since 2004 has broken down, afflicting civilians with further harm. Now is the time to lay the foundations for a lasting peace. Respect for the laws of war depends on prosecuting those responsible for serious violations, and ensuring justice and compensation for civilian victims. The Friends of Yemen should urge both the government and the rebels to investigate allegations of unlawful attacks that harmed civilians.

The Friends should also push the UN to establish a human rights monitoring and reporting mission in Yemen. The use of such missions in other conflicts has shown that these missions can act as a protective presence for civilians.

An independent UN mission would also help to constrain growing violence surrounding pro-secession protests in southern Yemen. Government forces over the past three years have used unnecessary and

sometimes lethal force to quell peaceful demonstrations. No one has been held accountable for the close-range shooting of at least a dozen peaceful protesters. This excessive use of force has fueled protests, which sometimes turned violent.

President Saleh's offer of talks about southern grievances is welcome; but he has failed to follow through on similar earlier offers. Resolving differences through talks is desirable, but should not substitute for providing for a safe space for southerners to air grievances, and holding security forces and protesters alike accountable when they use unlawful violence. An independent UN monitoring and reporting mission, and an independent Yemeni judiciary, could help provide this safe space, which in turn will keep the doors to dialogue open.

Respect for human rights is also essential in the struggle against terrorism. Since the 2000 bombing of the USS Cole, and the attacks of September 11, 2001, Yemeni security forces have arrested hundreds of suspects, without regard to due process protections in Yemen's criminal procedure laws. Scores remain "disappeared" for months. Many have complained of torture after their release. Recently, US-assisted aerial attacks on suspected terrorists in Abyan and Shabwa provinces in December killed at least 42 civilians, as the government now acknowledges. When civilian lives are lost in such attacks, the US and its allies risk alienating local populations and making victories in counterterrorism ephemeral.

If the Friends of Yemen want a stable and united Yemen, they need to do more than offer economic aid. They need to underline that respect for human rights is critical to maintaining peace in Sa'da, resolving southern grievances without further bloodshed, and confronting terrorism effectively. Yemen's friends have the financial and diplomatic tools to do this. They should be honest with their Yemeni counterparts that they will not stand by Sa'da unless it ends these abuses.

Christoph Wilcke is a senior Middle East and North Africa researcher for Human Rights Watch.

SKETCHED OPINION



By: Hamid

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# Simchat Torah in Yemen

By: Josh Berer  
<http://joshberer.wordpress.com>

The holiday of Simchat Torah celebrates the completion of the Torah. It is a festive holiday, one of singing and dancing. It is tradition to parade the Torah in circles around the synagogue, singing all the while. In Yemen, the synagogue is the rabbi's living room, so we paraded the Torah around a podium in the center of the room.

The Torah used by this community is more than 300 years old. It has survived more than four wars, and like the Jews of Tourist City, is a refugee. There are actually two Torahs, but one is unfit for use in services and thus lives in a closet. However, for the service it was brought out and paraded around.

Prior to their exodus from the north, the Jews had another Torah, more than 500 years old and written on deer's hide



Simchat Torah celebrates the completion of the Torah

that had been prepared in such a way that it turned bright red as it aged. This is a unique trait of Yemenite Jewry. The Houthis stole, defaced, then destroyed this Torah, following the Jews' flight from Sa'ada.

In Mizrahi Jewish practice, a metal or wooden case is traditionally used to hold the Torah. The case is designed to open in such a way that each end of the scroll is held in place. In their exodus from Sa'ada, this case was abandoned, and the Torah is now wrapped in a series of textiles, then covered in bubble wrap, and then finally a blue tarp.

The following evening, Mori Yahya went to the market and came back with two massive garbage bags full of junk food and candy. On the morning of the holiday, the entire community assembled in the rabbi's living room and candy was handed out to the kids, who started little stashes in every pocket and nook they could find.



The entire community assembled in the rabbi's living room and candy was handed out to the kids

Continued from page 1

## Amnesty International concerned with rights deterioration in Yemen

### Southern discontent

Tens of thousands of people have demonstrated in the past three years against what they perceive as discrimination against the south by the government in Sana'a. The scale of opposition is reflected in the ubiquitous red, white, blue and black flags of the previously separate state of South Yemen and widespread graffiti. In response, the authorities have increasingly resorted to unlawful killings, arbitrary arrests and excessive use of force against peaceful demonstrators.

Peaceful protests began in August 2007, led by former soldiers angry that they received lower pensions and pay than their counterparts in the north. A heavy-handed response by the authorities contributed to the formation of the Southern Movement.

Many factions of the movement call for the south to secede from the north.

The Yemeni authorities deny the accusations of discrimination against the south and accuse the Southern Movement of links with al-Qa'ida and of containing an armed element. They point to violent clashes between armed protesters and the security forces in 2009 that left casualties on both sides. These clashes have, in fact, been

exceptions. For its part, the Southern Movement denies any link to al-Qa'ida and stresses the peaceful nature of its campaigning.

Since early 2010, the security forces have stepped up operations against the Southern Movement. In late February 2010, for example, more than 90 people

were arrested during demonstrations. In March, the government declared a state of emergency in al-Dali', imposed nightcurfews for varying periods in al-Dali', Radfan and Zinjibar, and closed down mobile phone networks in some areas.

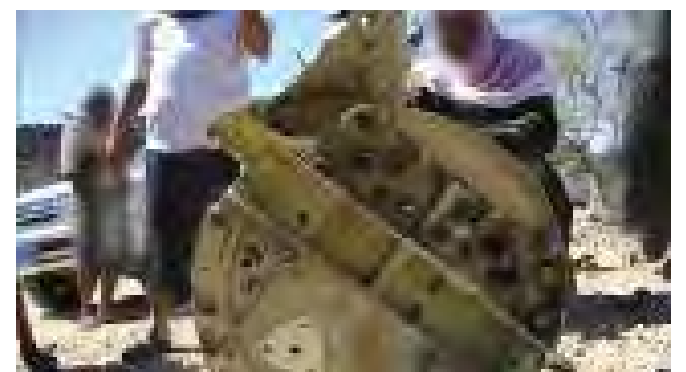
The first five months of 2010 also witnessed the killing of several Southern Movement activists. Among them was Ali al-Haddi, a relatively new member of the Movement.

Security forces stormed his house at 3.30am on 1 March 2010. Hours after shooting and injuring him in the leg, they shot him dead.

They also shot dead a relative. When the family viewed Ali al-Haddi's body



Unexploded BLU 97 cluster bomb and part of the propulsion unit of a BGM-109D Tomahawk cruise missile found at the site of the attack in Abyan. The pictures suggest that a US-manufactured cruise missile carrying cluster bombs was used during the attack. This type of missile is designed to carry 166 cluster bomblets, each exploding into more than 200 sharp steel fragments.



at the mortuary a few hours later, it had been mutilated. Among other things, his lips had been cut off. Afterwards, the authorities claimed that Ali al-Haddi was a member of al-Qa'ida, an allegation ridiculed by activists.

Since 2007 the security forces are reported to have killed scores of people in or near demonstrations, most of

which were peaceful although a few involved low-level violence such as stone-throwing. Some of those killed were bystanders.

Thousands of protesters and bystanders have been arrested and detained, in many cases arbitrarily. Most were quickly released but many have been held for long periods without

charge or trial and denied any means to challenge the legality of their detention. Some detainees say that they have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated.

Following amnesties announced by the President in May, most detainees linked with the unrest in the south have been released.

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# Families living on Ramadan



Women selling lahooh and other breads for Ramadan.

By: Nadia Al-Sakkaf

Unlike most Yemenis in Ramadan, Haima's family wakes up early. Haima, 13, and her three sisters start their early morning Ramadan tasks under their mom's supervision.

"We have to make 100 lahoohs, 50 malooj, ten bags of sambosa wrappers each with 50 pieces, and we have to have it all ready by noon prayers," she said.

Lahooh is a thin Yemeni bread made especially during this month to be mixed with a yogurt sauce and turned into the Ramadan special sha-

foot. Malooj is a type of Yemeni bread, and sambosa wrappers are rectangular plain dough sheets. These sheets are to be stuffed with minced meet, vegetables or other ingredients to make yet another Ramadan special called sambosa.

Many Yemeni families that are often headed by women without a regular source of income make use of the demand for these types of bread to earn an income. Like Haima's family, several families make products to be sold in supermarkets and local shops.

Other families consider Ramadan as a special begging season, and whole families including the elderly and infants take to the streets pleading for

money.

Omar says he is seven years old although because of malnutrition his body is that of a smaller child. He says his father teaches him and his entire family different begging lines. "In Ramadan we work mostly during the night time, starting from four in the evening until dawn. We learn many Quran verses and tell people that if they give us charity during Ramadan they are rewarded 70 times more, and it works."

Some families who depend on selling food such as boiled potatoes and eggs, especially in front of schools, change their selling times and the types of food they sell.

"People eat differently during Ramadan. Obviously we can't sell during day time as everyone is keeping fast so we sell in the evening. Now I sell hot sauce and pickles which my wife makes at home. The ingredients cost less and we earn more money," said Abu Yousif, a 30 year old man who supports a family of seven by selling food products made at home.

**Ramadan investment**

Some women consider this month as a financial investment opportunity. Some buy traditional "tanoor" ovens in order to bake bread to sell during the month. Some men buy motorbikes to turn into two wheeled taxis.

Some families have learned to buy cooking oil months before the season begins and then resell it at a profit during Ramadan as the prices increase during this month.

"We know that there are a lot of fried dishes during this month so we make it a point to buy the oil months earlier whether for the sambosas we sell or for selling the oil as it is," said Fauzia Al-Hammadi who sells ready-made meat sambosas.

Some families adopt new professions during this month just because it is in demand. Um Shihab Al-Shaqi says that her husband who works in construction as a daily laborer starts selling cooking gas cylinders during Ramadan because there is a lot of demand for it and less construction work.

Some needy families have learned to be sensitive to the market demands and become creative in the goods they produce. Many women start making dishes and sell them in their neighborhood. The more well off neighbors buy from the poor families in order to support them and also to help cover some of the cooking chores.

"Closer to Eid time families have a house cleaning spree so I let my neighbors know that my girls and I are ready to help them clean up for little money. The families usually pay us more than the agreed price because they feel it is part of the Ramadan zakat," said Amina Naser, a widow supporting five children.

Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world and the poorest in the Middle East and North Africa region. With up to 40 percent under the food poverty line and an unemployment rate of at least 35 percent, families struggle just to make ends meet.

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# The happiness of Eid in Al-Said



Led by their imam, the men of Al-Said, Shabwa, head to the mosque.

By: Nasser Abdulla Nasser Saleh  
For the Yemen Times

It is a great occasion celebrated twice a year by Muslims throughout the world. Eid is a religious and social festival marked by Muslims in compliance with Islamic teachings and it is also a show of happiness and joy.

The first of two canonical festivals of Islam is Eid Al-Fitr, also called Al-Eid Al-Saghir, or little Eid. It is the Islamic festival at the end of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of fasting, and celebrated on the first day of Shawwal.

The second festival is called Eid Al-Adha, or Al-Eid Al-Kabir, the big Eid. It is the Islamic festival of sacrifice and marks the culmination of Hajj, the three-day Islamic pilgrimage to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. The celebrations begin on the 10th of Dhu Al-Hijja, the last month of the Islamic calendar.

Like any part of the Islamic world, Yemen receives, welcomes and warmly embraces both occasions with joy, great delight and happiness. Al-Said in the eastern governorate of Shabwa is no exception.

A few days before Eid, everyone is very busy preparing for the celebration. As a result, markets are crowded with people busily shopping for new and fashionable clothes, shoes and other items. Men and boys get their hair cut, women have their hands, arms and feet decorated with henna or black dye

known as khadhab, and sitting rooms are elegantly redecorated with new furnishings. For example, cushions, pillows and couches are provided or sometimes houses are decorated inside with new linoleum, paint and lime. During Eid al-Adha, fat sheep are bought to be offered as sacrifices taking after the teachings of the prophet Abraham (PBUH) and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

At sundown on the eve of Eid, the people, absolutely delighted with Eid, light a number of bonfires, scattered here and there on the tops of mountains overlooking the village of Al-Said. Children play with fireworks.

The mood early in the morning is pleasant and happy, with everyone dressed in new clothes, exuding pleasant odor of incense and perfume. The women put on make-up and wear their new clothes as well as silver and gold jewelry. The men may wear traditional turbans topped with sprigs of basil and embroidered habiyya, or large colored shawls, on their shoulders. They may also carry rifles or wear belts containing a number of bullets as well as a jambiyya, a traditional dagger. The children proudly display their new clothes and the houses are redolent with perfumes and incenses.

Accompanied by their children, the men head to the Maroon Valley, a place where they gather and chant solemnly the traditional verses, "God is great, God is great, God is great, there is no God but God, God is great, God is great

and praise be upon Him." Meanwhile, the children go to set off fireworks and the attendants begin the Eid prayers after the imam then sit and listen to the sermon. They promptly divide themselves into two lines, one of which move about whereas the others stand and consequently shake hands of congratulations and say for example "Min al-'aideen" which means "Many happy returns."

The men head back to their houses, while some pass through the cemetery to visit the graves of their dead relatives and ask Allah for forgiveness and to have mercy upon them. A few people walk in the company of an imam chanting classical religious verses after

him, saying "Oh God, we have no one but You, oh Lord. We have no source but You, oh Lord" until they reach the historical old mosque called Omer and Ahmad's mosque.

The opening verse of the Quran is recited by the imam. Immediately after, a member of the Al-Salad clan says, "Wa hayl haylu bi-sil" and the attendants answer, "May God give you good you good news," after which the people make for their houses.

In each household, family members exchanged greetings and congratulations, and at about nine o'clock in the morning they eat a well-known delicious meal which consists of pressed bread with honey and ghee or sesame

oil. Apart from this food, traditional sour bread called zad is served for visitors with sesame oil and a mixture made of yoghurt, pepper, and cumin boiled together with some flour. Additionally, tea and coffee, with ginger, juices, cake, biscuits and sweets are also served for visitors, most of them children. A meal of meat and rice meal is served at noon and at night. Women go in groups to visit their relatives and neighbors.

Likewise, the men, some of whom shoot their guns in the air in front of the house, also go to visit their relatives, neighbors and friends at their houses

and exchange congratulations during the days of Eid. Special fun activities take place during Eid, such as dangling ropes from the indoor ceilings as swings for children. However, during Eid al-Adha, children and women gather to swing together indoors for three days. Furthermore, men perform folkloric dances in the afternoons outdoors.

Everybody is happy, cheering for Eid and praying humbly to God that he makes the next year one of peace and security. Eid is a time of joy, love, brotherhood, tolerance, reconciliation and bringing Muslims together.

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