



**CPJ Submission to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review of Yemen**

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**Committee to Protect Journalists**

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### **Brief description of CPJ:**

1. The Committee to Protect Journalists is an independent, nonprofit organization that promotes press freedom worldwide. We defend the right of journalists to report the news without fear of reprisal.
2. CPJ is made up of about 40 experts around the world, with headquarters in New York City. When press freedom violations occur, CPJ mobilizes a network of correspondents who report and take action on behalf of those targeted.
3. CPJ reports on violations in repressive countries, conflict zones, and established democracies alike. A board of prominent journalists from around the world helps guide CPJ's activities.
4. CPJ's work is based on its research, which provides a global snapshot of obstructions to a free press worldwide. CPJ's research staff document hundreds of attacks on the press each year.

### **Summary:**

Since Yemen's last Universal Periodic Review in January 2014, the country has been buffeted by a civil war that has resulted in the capital Sanaa and the country's north and west falling under the control of the Ansar Allah movement, commonly known as the Houthis. Since March 2015, a multinational coalition led by Saudi Arabia has waged a military intervention aimed at overthrowing the Houthis, while in the southern region of the country an array of armed groups trained, funded, and led by the United Arab Emirates hold significant sway, despite the internationally recognized government based in Aden having nominal control. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula also continues to be present and exert influence in several governorates.

Given the tenuous and evolving security environment present throughout the country, CPJ is gravely concerned over the environment for press freedom in Yemen. Since the time of Yemen's last UPR, CPJ has documented at least 16 journalists killed while working or because of their work as journalists. Additionally, CPJ has also documented arbitrary arrests, detentions, and kidnappings of journalists in all areas of the country, as well as assaults against individual journalists and outlets.

CPJ acknowledges the significant challenges that Yemen faces in terms of governance and security, and recognizes the government's responses to its last UPR recommendations. Nonetheless, much more must be done at a fundamental level to ensure that the country has a free press and a safe environment in which journalists can work.

### **Main Submission:**

5. The following information draws on CPJ's research on Yemen, which can be found on our website at this [link](#).
6. During the last UPR cycle, Yemen received seven [recommendations](#) regarding freedom of the press and supported all of them. Five of the seven recommendations were focused on the general safety and security of journalists operating in the country, with France, Lithuania, and the United States all calling on Yemen to investigate intimidation of and/or violence against journalists. Canada asked Yemen to fulfill its obligations under the prior UPR cycle to cease threats against journalists and ensure freedom of expression, and Colombia asked the government to "take appropriate measures to ensure the lives and security of journalists."
7. In the report submitted for the last cycle, it was noted that the internationally recognized government had revoked presidential directives to imprison journalists and was proposing amendments to the Press and Publication Act that would make it easier for journalists to operate.

8. However, since the last UPR cycle Yemen has witnessed a rapid deterioration in its political and overall security situation, and as a result, CPJ is now primarily concerned with the basic physical safety of journalists attempting to operate in the country.
9. CPJ has [documented](#) at least 16 journalists killed since the beginning of Yemen's civil war in 2014. The physical threats against journalists in the country have come from all sides in the conflict.
10. At least one journalist, [Luke Somers](#), was directly targeted for murder by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula during a failed rescue attempt.
11. At least six journalists were killed by Saudi-led coalition air strikes since the start of the coalition military intervention in 2015, according to CPJ research, including [Abdullah Qabil](#), [Almigdada Mojalli](#), [Bilal Sharaf al-Deen](#), [Hashim al-Hamran](#), [Mohamed Shamsan](#), and [Youssef al-Ayzari](#). At least two of those journalists, al-Deen and al-Hamran, worked for the Houthi-run satellite channel Al-Masirah. According to media reports, in March 2015 a spokesperson for the Saudi-led coalition [said](#) that the coalition considered media outlets that supported the Houthis to be legitimate military targets, without elaborating further.
12. CPJ has also documented press freedom violations committed by forces nominally controlled by and loyal to the internationally recognized government of Yemen. In many cases, the forces responsible for the violations are trained, funded, and answerable to coalition allies, notably the United Arab Emirates, despite ostensibly being controlled by the Yemeni government.
13. On February 21, 2018, the Yemeni Army's elite special forces in Hadramout [detained](#) Awad Kashmeem in Mokalla, reportedly on the orders of Hadramout Governor Faraj al-Bahasni. Elite special forces operating in Hadramout Province are answerable to the UAE, meaning that any actions they undertook would need at least tacit approval from the UAE. Prior to his arrest, Kashmeem had resigned from the board of the Bakhteer Foundation, which publishes the newspaper *November 30*, and said in a Facebook post that the provincial government had withheld support for the paper after it reported on local corruption. Kashmeem also criticized the conduct of the coalition campaign in the province in a series of Facebook posts and a column for the *Aden Al-Ghad* newspaper earlier in the month. Kashmeem was released on March 18.
14. The Shoumou Foundation in Aden, which prints and publishes *Akhbar Al-Youm* newspaper, has also been the subject of repeated attacks. On March 1, 2018, armed assailants burst into the foundation's offices, which houses the printing press for *Akhbar Al-Youm*, and set fire to the printing press, CPJ [documented](#) at the time. The foundation's director, Saif al-Haderi, told CPJ that the assailants dressed and moved in a manner consistent with forces operating as part of the so-called Security Belt forces operating in and around the city. Though nominally controlled by the Yemeni government, the forces are trained, funded, and controlled by the UAE.
15. On March 23, unidentified gunmen raided the Shoumou Foundation's offices and abducted seven employees, who were later released, CPJ also [documented](#).
16. In January 2018, CPJ [documented](#) the shuttering of Al Jazeera's bureau in Taiz by Yemeni military forces. According to Al Jazeera, the closure was the result of an [order](#) from the Taiz Security Committee which accused the channel of trying to create divisions between the local government and the Saudi-led coalition. The bureau remains closed.
17. The Houthis have been responsible for numerous violations in the parts of Yemen under their control. As of December 2017, the Houthis were detaining at least 13 journalists, CPJ [reported](#) at the time. According to [news reports](#), at least two of those journalists, Hussein al-Easi and Abdullah al-Munifi, were released in March 2018. Journalists who have been released from Houthi custody have described ill-treatment in detention and lack of access to medical care. In June, a journalist who had been abducted and held for a year by the Houthis, [Anwar al-Rakan](#), died two days after his release.

18. In April 2017, a court controlled by the Houthis sentenced former columnist Yahya al-Jubaihi to death, CPJ [reported](#). Al-Jubaihi later had the sentenced overturned and was released in September 2017.
19. In early December 2017, Houthi forces stormed the headquarters of television channel Yemen Today in Sanaa and held at least 40 employees in the building hostage for more than a week, CPJ [reported](#), before releasing them December 13.
20. Other journalists have disappeared in areas under Houthi control. [Waheed al-Sufi](#), editor-in-chief of the weekly newspaper *Al-Arabiya*, was abducted by unidentified gunmen on April 6, 2015, as he paid the newspaper's bills at a post office in Sanaa, according to CPJ research. His whereabouts remain unknown.
21. Journalists who have [spoken to CPJ](#) have described an atmosphere of intimidation, including daily risk of harassment or assault from Houthi forces. In some cases, merely carrying a camera or appearing to take pictures or video footage incurs a hostile response from the group's members.

**Recommendations for the Yemeni government:**

22. Investigate all cases of killings, assaults, or threats against journalists, regardless of the affiliation of the journalist, their outlet, or the suspected perpetrator.
23. Allow journalists to operate and report freely, without fear of reprisal.
24. End arbitrary detentions of journalists who are just doing their jobs.
25. Conduct a dialogue with coalition authorities to ensure that journalists carrying out their work are not targeted during military operations.
26. Exercise closer control over militias allied with the government to ensure that they are not violating the rights of journalists.

**Annex 1: Relevant recommendations from 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle [2014]**

Theme: Freedom of the press

1. A - 115.17 Amend the Press and Publication Act by repealing provisions that curtail journalists' rights and prescribe excessive penalties (Lithuania)
2. A - 115.65 Bolster the investigation of cases of gender-based violence and violence against journalists (United States)
3. A - 115.110 Take all necessary measures to protect journalists, particularly by prosecuting perpetrators of violence or intimidations against them (France)
4. A - 115.111 Ensure fulfilment of recommendations accepted by Yemen during its previous UPR to cease threats against journalists, to take steps to guarantee and promote freedom of expression, and to amend and enforce the Press and Publication Act (Canada)
5. A - 115.112 Take appropriate measures to ensure the lives and security of journalists and human rights defenders (Colombia)
6. A - 115.17 Ensure prompt and effective investigation of intimidation and threats against journalists (Lithuania)
7. A - 115.114 Continue to implement the Press and Publication Act in accordance with international standards (Palestine)