

## **On International Human Rights Day, Yemen is a Critical Test of Global Commitment to Human Rights**

International Human Rights Day, 10 December, commemorates the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and with it the introduction of common human rights standards “for all peoples and all nations”. This day serves also as a stark reminder that, whenever and wherever humanity's values are abandoned, humanity is [at greater risk](#). Yet, today, the people of Yemen have been abandoned by the international community. The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC)'s [vote](#) to dismantle the United Nations Group of Eminent of Experts (GEE) is a setback for the multilateral human rights system: not only it has ensured total impunity for all parties to the armed conflict in the country, but it has also left victims of gross human rights violations without any prospect of justice, reparations and redress.

In Yemen, [impunity](#) for egregious human rights violations and abuses and serious violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, is shocking. It underlines the complete lack of respect for international law by all parties to the armed conflict and for the values of human life and dignity that it is meant to protect.

For eight years, all parties to the armed conflict have perpetrated widespread and systematic abuses, including the indiscriminate killing and injuring of tens of thousands civilians, [unlawful airstrikes](#), and [laying landmines indiscriminately](#). The Saudi/UAE-led coalition, the Internationally Recognized Government (IRG) of Yemen, the Ansar Allah (Houthi) armed group, the UAE-backed forces, including the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and other warring parties have caused massive civilian harm in Yemen, committed serious international law violations, and failed to conduct credible investigations, ensure justice or provide reparations. Since the beginning of the armed conflict, an estimated 233,000 people have lost their lives, including 102,000 as a direct result of hostilities and 131,000 from indirect causes, such as conflict-related famine, widespread disease and destruction of health services.

The Yemeni people need an unambiguous commitment to lasting peace. The way to achieve this is through strong support for the rule of law and human rights, which ought to be addressed by the international community in a coordinated and inclusive manner, since all parties to the armed conflict have shown utter contempt for international law and for the lives and dignity of civilians in the country. The solutions to today's greatest crises are rooted in human rights, and, in this respect, Yemen's fate is no different. As such, we reiterate our call for **the creation of a robust, independent, international accountability mechanism that would investigate, publicly report, and pursue accountability for the most serious violations and abuses of international law committed in Yemen, including by collecting and preserving evidence, preparing files for potential future criminal prosecutions, as well as identifying victims and documenting harms for potential reparations claims in the future.**

Whether the international community will renew its commitment to protecting the millions of Yemenis whose lives hang by a thread, and to ensuring accountability for victims, or whether the international community will persist in its dereliction of duties for political convenience is a defining, momentous test for human rights globally.

More than a year has passed since the UNHRC [narrowly voted to terminate](#) the GEE in October 2021. Since then, the implementation of the human rights enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent human rights conventions and treaties [has consistently fallen short](#). The absence of any international accountability mechanism has created an epidemic of impunity in Yemen and a gap in public reporting, documentation of human rights violations and, ultimately, in the protection of civilians.

Despite the international pressure on and interest in ending the armed conflict in Yemen, the warring parties did not fully commit to implementing the United Nations-backed truce agreement that lasted for six months but expired in October 2022. While the truce was considered to be a [rare opportunity](#) to pivot towards peace, it [was marred by](#) violations, including ground shelling, drone attacks, use of live ammunition and landmines, recruitment, mobilization and use of children in hostilities, as well as attacks on civilian objects, such as hospitals and schools. This failure to properly comply with the truce agreement demonstrates that peace without an accountability mechanism to strengthen it is always fragile. The failure to reach a permanent and comprehensive peace agreement has trapped Yemenis in a bloody quagmire, the negative impacts of which are exacerbated by the [deteriorating economic](#) and political situation.

During 2022, the country has experienced the [displacement of 57,408 individuals](#).<sup>1</sup> The [humanitarian situation](#) in Yemen [has worsened desperately](#). The culture of impunity is compounded by the failure of all parties to the armed conflict to respond to civil society organizations' urgent demands, such as granting and enabling freedom of movement, and preventing further deterioration of the already serious humanitarian crisis through restoring road access. All parties to the armed conflict must restore road access to different governorates, including Mareb and Aldale, while the Ansar Allah (Houthi) group must restore [road access](#) to Taiz. Moreover, women are particularly restricted in their movements as Ansar Allah ["suffocates" them with the requirement for male guardians](#) when traveling inside or outside the country.

Parties to the armed conflict prevent [life-saving humanitarian aid](#) from reaching its destination, and [use starvation as a weapon of war](#). Restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of religion, the shrinking of the democratic space, arbitrary deprivations of liberty, [enforced disappearances](#) and intimidation of [women, journalists, activists, human rights defenders](#), including women human rights defenders and members of [minority groups, persist](#).

Instead of encouraging the cover up of the crimes being committed in Yemen by ending all efforts to document gross violations and abuses of international human rights law and serious violations of humanitarian law, the global human rights system should ensure accountability for the serious crimes under international law that have been documented independently by the GEE and are still ongoing. Only such a robust action will lead to the lasting peace that the population of Yemen deserves.

## Signatories:

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<sup>1</sup> From 1 January to 26 November 2022, IOM Yemen DTM tracked 9,568 households (HH) (57,408 Individuals) who experienced displacement at least once. Available at: <https://displacement.iom.int/reports/yemen-rapid-displacement-tracking-update-20-26-november-2022> (November, 2022)

1. Avaaz
2. Alkarama for Human Rights
3. Accion Solidaria
4. Bridges for Yemen
5. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
6. Campaign Against Arms Trade
7. Centre for Strategic Studies to support women and children
8. Civilis Human Rights
9. Democracy School
10. Electronic Organization For Humanitarian Media
11. FOMICRES - Peacebuilding, Crime Prevention and Social Reinsertion
12. Dhameer for Human Rights
13. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
14. Gulf Centre for Human Rights
15. PASS Foundation- Peace For Sustainable Societies
16. Human Life Foundation for Development and Relief
17. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
18. International Commission of Jurists
19. Qarar Foundation for Media and Development
20. SAM Organization Right and libraries
21. Watch for Human Rights (Watch4HR)
22. The Observer Human Right Organization
23. Vision GRAM-International
24. Mwatana for Human Rights
25. Musaala organization for human rights
26. Studies and Economic Media Center
27. Salam For Yemen
28. WITNESS Organization
29. Yemeni Archive
30. Yemen Future for Culture and Media Development
31. Yemen Relief and Reconstruction Foundation
32. Yemeni Hub Media support