



YEMENI ARCHIVE

YEMEN JUSTICE NETWORK SUBMISSION TO THE WORKING GROUP ON ENFORCED OR INVOLUNTARY DISAPPEARANCES ON ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES AND MEMORIALIZATION IN YEMEN

A. Introduction

The Yemen Justice Network (YJN) welcomes the opportunity to contribute input on Yemen for inclusion in the upcoming thematic report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) on enforced disappearances and memorialization.

The YJN is a coalition of Yemeni and international civil society organizations working together to advance justice and reconciliation within Yemen's peace process. Formed in

2022 and institutionalized in 2025, the YJN co-launched “[The Yemen Declaration for Justice and Reconciliation](#)” with partner civil society organizations, expressing a collective commitment to addressing widespread rights abuses in Yemen grounded in victim-centeredness. Among these abuses – including historic and ongoing grievances – the YJN has called for any post-conflict justice process in Yemen to address enforced disappearances and abductions, as well as arbitrary detentions and violations of fair trial rights.

Enforced disappearance in Yemen dates back decades. A report by the WGEID concerning a visit to Yemen in August 1998 refers to “the pending cases of enforced disappearances which occurred as a result of the civil war in January 1986 in the former People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen”¹. Since the start of the conflict in 2014, Yemeni civil society organizations have increased the documentation of cases of enforced disappearances committed by all sides to the conflict in Yemen. Between 2014 and 2023, some 1,168 cases of enforced disappearance perpetrated by parties to the armed conflict in Yemen were documented although an incommensurable higher number of persons are believed to have disappeared.²

Despite the intensification of international efforts *vis-à-vis* the issue of missing persons – which includes the adoption by the Security Council of its landmark resolution in 2019 about missing persons in armed conflict³ – these have not produced any tangible results for the Yemeni context. Human rights in Yemen – including the issue of missing persons – suffers from a severe lack of international attention. The UN Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen – the only international mechanism reporting on enforced disappearances and other international law violations – ceased its activities in 2021 after the Human Rights Council rejected a resolution to renew its mandate⁴. The last interactive dialogue on human rights in Yemen took place in February 2021. Human Rights Council activities in Yemen mainly focus on technical cooperation in the field of human rights. Whilst technical cooperation is very important for the promotion of human rights in Yemen, it is clearly insufficient given the egregious human rights situation in the country. This point was again clearly made at the 60th session of the Human Rights Council (September 2025) including by representatives of international (non-governmental) organizations, such as

¹ Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances - Report on the mission to Yemen, E/CN.4/1999/62/Add.1, 22 December 1998.

² Public Statement by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Mwatana for Human Rights, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) on arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance in Yemen, 17 April 2023. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde31/6691/2023/en/>

³ Resolution 2474 (2019) adopted by the Security Council at its 8543rd meeting, on 11 June 2019. Available at [https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2474\(2019\)](https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2474(2019))

⁴ Statement by Group of Experts on Yemen on HRC rejection of resolution to renew their mandate, 8 October 2021. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/10/statement-group-experts-yemen-hrc-rejection-resolution-renew-their-mandate>

the European Union, Human Rights Watch and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies.

Enforced disappearances in Yemen committed by all parties to the conflict have escalated since 2014. One of the most common patterns of violation reported by Yemeni CSO and international organizations include the arbitrary arrest of individuals⁵ in unofficial places of detention. Detainees in this situation are often kept incommunicado for indefinite periods of time which in many instances yield no positive resolution since the whereabouts of the person are never to be found. Yemeni and international organizations have also highlighted patterns of torture and other forms of degrading and ill-treatment – namely sexual violence – that are perpetrated against victims of enforced disappearance including women⁶.

Civil society organizations have denounced enforced disappearances as tools of control and retaliation, as well as political bargaining such as in the case of prisoner exchanges, amid weak oversight and impunity. Yemeni Archive, a digital documentation, archiving and memorialization initiative member of the YJN, has described how enforced disappearances have “shocked Yemeni society and eroded trust in the state.”

In this very bleak context, memorialization efforts have emerged as essential coping mechanisms for families and communities seeking to preserve the memory of the disappeared and to clarify their fate and whereabouts. However, these efforts face severe challenges, including restrictions on public gatherings, harassment, denial of recognition and politicization of remembrance. Despite these obstacles, memorialization remains critical to resisting erasure, preserving evidence and strengthening efforts towards truth, accountability and prevention.

This submission is organized into four key sections that correspond to the structure outlined by the WGEID for this call for inputs, namely that suggested for Part 3 “Challenges and legal protection for persons, civil society, memorials and memorialization initiatives: addressing threats and safeguarding commemorative efforts”. The submission also includes a section containing recommendations that outlines concrete steps that can be taken by the WGEID based on the options available to Yemeni CSO to support memorialization initiatives in relation to enforced disappearances.

⁵ Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, A/HRC/57/9. 24 June 2024.

⁶ Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since 2014 – Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen, A/HRC/48/20 (13 September 2021).

B. Challenges and legal protection for persons, civil society, memorials, and memorialization initiatives: addressing threats and safeguarding commemorative efforts

1. Which forms of threat have been documented against families of disappeared persons, communities and civil society who engage in memorialization? Which forms of threats and attacks against memorials have been documented?

The information below points to trends and patterns of abuse against civil society organizations from Yemen in a general manner. Information concerning threats and attacks against memorialization activities is also detailed below according to publicly available information and that relayed by organizations that form part of the Yemen Justice Network.

A common scenario faced in Yemen by civil society organizations that document human rights violations including enforced disappearance is violence directed against CSO staff. Since the conflict in Yemen started in 2014, CSO staff have faced an increased number of incidents at the hands of parties to the conflict resulting in physical injuries – some of them resulting in loss of life – and long-term mental health sequels and other forms of incapacitation. Another scenario is the arrest of CSO staff such as the arrests occurred in May and June 2024 in Sana'a⁷. Throughout 2025, more Yemeni and international staff were arrested by de facto authorities⁸. According to the monthly briefing delivered by the UN Special Envoy for Yemen to the Security Council in February 2026, “73 United Nations colleagues in addition to other former United Nations staff are detained, along with others from civil society and diplomatic missions. Many have been held incommunicado, with serious concerns about their conditions and well-being.”⁹

Families, victim associations and survivor groups face a range of threats when seeking to memorialize the disappeared, including intimidation, smear campaigns, arbitrary arrest and denial of information¹⁰. The Association of the Mothers of Abductees has denounced

⁷ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Continued detention of staff in Yemen”, 14 June 2024. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2024/06/continued-detention-staff-yemen#:~:text=It%20has%20now%20been%20a,legal%20protection%20in%20recent%20days.>

⁸ “Houthi rebels detain 20 UN staff in Yemen”, 19 October 2025. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/oct/19/houthi-rebels-detain-20-un-staff-in-yemen>

⁹ Briefing by the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, to the Security Council, 12 February 2026. Available at: <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/en/news/briefing-un-special-envoy-yemen-hans-grundberg-security-council-0>

¹⁰ Yemen: Mothers of Abductees League condemns the Houthi/Saleh militia attack on their protest off the UN mission in Sanaa, 21 July, 2019. Available at: <https://ama-ye.org/yemen-mothers-of-abductees-league-condemns-the-houthi-saleh-militia-attack-on-their-protest-off-the-un-mission-in-sanaa/>

the arrest on different occasions of members of their own staff. Memorial events and public gatherings have often been blocked or dispersed, while digital suppression and harassment – including internet shutdown and censorship around politically sensitive moments such as demonstrations and anniversaries – have undermined the ability to preserve memory and maintain digital memorial spaces.

In 2016, the Abductees' Mothers Association (AMA) designated April 18 as Abductee's Day in Yemen¹¹, hosting commemorative [rallies](#) and advocacy campaigns online and in person, calling for authorities to disclose the locations of their loved ones and facilitate reunification. Despite a campaign to get the Yemeni government and de facto authorities to officially recognize this day and enact it through national legislation, authorities have refrained from doing so. Dozens of demonstrations and rallies have been coordinated calling out violations such as enforced disappearances, with authorities interfering and subjecting participants to assault and beatings, with a number of female participants persecuted. The widespread nature of enforced disappearances in Yemen – conducted by all parties to the conflict – has created further challenges for advancing memorialization efforts that include affected families from across the country. More recently, participants traveling to join rallies in Aden and Sana'a have been threatened with beatings.

2. What legal protection mechanisms exist to shield families of disappeared persons, communities and civil society from such backlash in Yemen? What renders such mechanisms effective and what, on the contrary, has proved inefficient? What are other proposed ways for effective protection?

- a. *International and national law*

Yemen is a party to seven of the nine core international human rights treaties. The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) remains one of two core treaties Yemen has yet to ratify. Despite the Yemeni Cabinet approving ratification of the ICPPED in June 2013 and the government accepting recommendations during several cycles of the country's Universal Periodic Review to ratify the Convention - including in the national report submitted in February 2024 in the frame of the UPR's fourth cycle , no progress has been made towards ratification.

Under international law, including Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 20 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, Yemen is obliged

¹¹ Abductees' Mothers Association: April 18 should be declared as Yemeni Abductees' Day, 21 April 2022. Available at: <https://jinhaagency.com/en/actual/abductees-mothers-association-april-18-should-be-declared-as-yemeni-abductees-day-31094>

to respect the right to freedom of association. Families and civil society organizations must be able to convene for peaceful protests, vigils and events aimed at preserving the memory of victims and demanding information on their whereabouts free from harassment and interference. Similarly, under Article 3 of Yemen's [Law on Associations and Foundations](#), authorities must ensure that associations and foundations "can carry out their activities with complete freedom and independence...". Despite this, and as noted before, civil society organizations, human rights activists and journalists are frequently subjected to arrests, detention and imprisonment by all parties to the conflict in Yemen.

b. National Institutions

Although a [national commission](#) for the investigation of alleged human rights violations (NCIAHRV) was established by Republican Decree in 2012, based on the texts of the Gulf Initiative and Security Council resolutions amongst other UN instruments, its efforts remain limited¹². Yemen's ongoing conflict and political fragmentation further complicates its mandate, as different territories remain under the control of different authorities, problematizing accessibility to certain areas.

The NCIAHRV pays special attention to arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances. According to its thirteenth periodic report¹³, published in July 2025, the Commission documented a total of 695 cases. Even though these figures represent only a fragment of much higher numbers of persons who have been forcibly disappeared, the Commission plays nevertheless a very important role because it is one of the few national institutions that collects information about missing persons¹⁴ and also because the Commission's work meets minimum requirements to store, manage and protect sensitive, confidential and classified information. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that the Commission has a specific mandate and cannot - and also should not - replace Yemen's institutions mandated to address enforced disappearances, such as the judiciary and the

¹² On July 8 2025, Rashad al Alimi extended the mandate of the Commission for an additional three years, starting from 23 August 2025. See "Republican Decree on extending mandate of national committee for investigating human rights violations", 8 July 2025. Available at: <https://president.alimi.net/en/news/1213.html#:~:text=Violations%20%7C%20President%20Dr.-.Republican%20Decree%20on%20Extending%20Mandate%20of%20National%20Committee.Allegations%20of%20Human%20Rights%20Violations&text=Republican%20Decree%20No.,published%20in%20the%20Official%20Gazette.>

¹³ Thirteenth Periodic Report on the Work of the National Commission to Investigate Alleged Violations of Human Rights - from August 1 2024 until July 31 2025. Available at: <https://www.nciye.org/reports/ThirteenthReport/ThirteenthReport-en.pdf>

¹⁴ In 2013, the Council of Ministers adopted a decree to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons against Enforced Disappearance. The government had also planned to establish a national mechanism to address the issue of missing and forcibly disappeared persons. The government has claimed that the outbreak of conflict and war have delayed the entry into force of these measures. Currently, there are no mechanisms available to families of missing persons.

Office of the Attorney General. Moreover, being an institution with limited durability - the Commission's mandate is subject to renewal by the President of Yemen - it is very difficult for the Commission to obtain the support necessary (institutional, technical, financial, human resources) to put in place measures to protect victims and witnesses - including those who cooperate with the National Commission on cases of enforced disappearances - from intimidation and reprisals¹⁵.

At the same time, some organizations part of the YJN have reported that efforts led by families to seek information about their loved ones are met with threats, harassment and persecution. Even though Yemen has adopted in 2012 a law on the right of access to information¹⁶ - which establishes the legal right for Yemeni citizens and foreign residents to access information from public bodies - this law has had very little practical use and access to information on forcibly disappeared persons, including individuals from marginalized and minority backgrounds (Mohamasheen, Bahai's), remains extremely limited. Some officials have willingly shared information about forcibly disappeared persons. However, this type of cooperation has been voluntary, inconsistent and rare.

Structural weaknesses in the security and judicial systems prevent accountability from extending to perpetrators of enforced disappearance, including those in positions of leadership. At present, the judicial system is often unable to hold even low-ranking officials accountable, calling into question its capacity to address responsibility at higher levels. Yemen's political fragmentation has severely undermined the independence and functions of legal and judicial institutions, rendering them largely incapable of effectively investigating and prosecuting perpetrators of enforced disappearance. In its 2025 report, the National Commission of Inquiry also noted that political fragmentation within the government itself has led to a situation whereby different parties affiliated with the government monopolize control of different areas with an almost complete lack of coordination amongst them. Moreover, security agencies act independently of any government oversight. As a result, there has been a noticeable increase in the numbers of persons arbitrarily detained as well as in cases of enforced disappearances¹⁷.

Cases of enforced disappearance are routinely exploited and politicized by Yemeni authorities, often used selectively against opponents as a tool of retaliation rather than addressed through a rights-based approach. To date, Yemen has yet to establish an independent national human rights institution in full compliance with the Paris Principles, leaving the country without a nationally mandated body operating in

¹⁵ "Implementation of technical assistance provided to the National Commission of Inquiry to investigate allegations of violations and abuses committed by all parties to the conflict in Yemen", Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, A/HRC/60/85, 10 September 2025.

¹⁶ See Law 13 of 2012 regarding the right of access to information. Available at: <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/legislation/details/20003>.

¹⁷ See supra no. 11.

accordance with minimum international standards for the promotion and protection of human rights.¹⁸ Due to the inability of state authorities to intervene or their lack of action, the issue of missing and disappeared persons has in certain instances been dealt at the local level. One example is the Shabwa National General Council. In 2024, the Council became increasingly involved with the issue of detainees and enforced disappearances following the June 2024 disappearance of a prominent security official from neighboring Abyan in Aden. At the beginning of August 2024, the Council announced the establishment of a legal team to follow up on the file of detainees from the governorate¹⁹. Although the Council's involvement on this issue seems to have been triggered by the detention that occurred in June, the issue of missing persons and enforced disappearances has long been affecting the governorate. In January 2026, the President of Yemen government ordered the closure of all illegal prisons and detention centers formerly run by the Southern Transitional Council, focusing on the governorates of Aden, Lahj and al Dhalea, as well as the transfer of detainees to officially sanctioned prisons and detention centers²⁰. However, the presidential order did not address the situation of all illegal places of detention, including those located in areas controlled by governmental forces.

Notwithstanding these initiatives and their importance for purposes of addressing enforced disappearances in Yemen, they do not replace the need for dedicated national mechanisms mandated to receive complaints, document and investigate cases and recommend appropriate action in respect of missing and forcibly disappeared persons in Yemen.

c. Support to Families (Psychological, financial, physical)

Currently, there is no designated fund aimed at supporting the families of missing persons. Some families may have benefited from financial assistance through the Authority for the Care of the Families of Martyrs and Combatants of the Yemeni Revolution - not because they are families of missing persons but most likely because their missing relatives have been declared dead. Families of missing persons may also receive some support through social protection programmes in Yemen - such as the Social Welfare Fund - but it remains unclear how much of that support is provided because the families concerned have missing relatives.

¹⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Letter from the High Commissioner to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Republic of Yemen, Universal Periodic Review (46th Session), 20 January 2025. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/upr/sessions/session46/hc-letters/HC-letter-Yemen-en.pdf>

¹⁹ "Kidnapped and Forcibly Disappeared: The Transitional Justice Crime in Aden Under Government Cover," *Yemen Youth Net*, August 31, 2024

²⁰ "President of Presidential Council orders closure of illegal prisons, release of unlawfully held detainees", 12 January 2026. Available at: <https://presidentlalimi.net/en/news1536.html>

In addition to the families' profound and intense feelings of loss and grief, another serious consequence of enforced disappearances is the loss of their primary breadwinners. This places the burden of both caregiving and the search for missing relatives on women and children. UN agencies have provided only limited assistance at times, while Yemeni civil society organizations have offered what they can, including psychosocial support for women and children and skills training to mitigate the economic impact of losing a breadwinner. However, these grassroots organizations have limited capacity and receive insufficient support to expand and sustain their work.

3. How can the UN and regional human rights mechanisms contribute to the safeguard of commemorative practices in cases of enforced disappearances?

Yemen suffers from a deficit of attention by UN and regional human rights mechanisms. Currently, the only international mechanism that provides some coverage of human rights issues is the Panel of Experts that assists the Sanctions Committee established by the Security Council in 2014²¹. With the non-renewal in 2021 of the mandate of the UN Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts (GEE)²², Yemen lost a key human rights monitoring instrument, including with regards enforced disappearances. The GEE and its reporting activity also helped ensure regular opportunities for the Group to brief other UN bodies - such as the Security Council and the Human Rights Council - as well as permanent representatives and observers to the United Nations about the human rights situation in Yemen. However, after its non-renewal, there has been a drastic decrease in international scrutiny with regards the human rights situation in Yemen. The last interactive dialogue at the UN on the human rights situation in Yemen took place in February 2021. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Yemen focuses on technical assistance, capacity building and supporting national mechanisms and has a very limited mandate to conduct in-country human rights monitoring. Within the context of an already very restricted mandate, the liquidity crisis in relation to the regular budget of the UN has led to a reduction of the activities carried out by OHCHR Yemen in support of the National Commission of Inquiry²³. This general panorama is important because without more international support - particularly from the United Nations - for human rights work in Yemen in general, it will be very difficult to ensure the availability of resources within the UN for specific work related to enforced disappearances in Yemen. The sub-sections below provide an overview of two key UN instruments that can make significant contributions to addressing enforced disappearances, including with regards memorialization initiatives and activities. They

²¹ Security Council Committee established pursuant to Resolution 2140 (2014). Available at: <https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/sanctions/2140/panel-of-experts/work-and-mandate>

²² See supra no. 3.

²³ See "Implementation of technical assistance provided to the National Commission of Inquiry to investigate allegations of violations and abuses committed by all parties to the conflict in Yemen - Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights", A/HRC/60/85, 10 September 2025.

also include suggestions about digital documentation given its potential to contribute to the memorialization of enforced disappearances in Yemen.

a. Office of the United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen (OESGY)

Even though the Special Envoy's Office is not mandated to work on enforced disappearances, it has nevertheless played an important role due to its role in facilitating prisoner exchanges between parties to the conflict in Yemen.

The Envoy's mandate in the so-called prisoner exchanges is based on the Stockholm Agreement (2018)²⁴ which was subsequently endorsed by the Security Council through resolution 2451 (2018)²⁵. According to the agreement, the concerned parties to the conflict provide the Office of the Special Envoy and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) lists of detainees, prisoners, kidnapped persons and other persons arrested. A supervisory committee, co-chaired by the OESGY and by the ICRC, was also established under the Stockholm Agreement "to support the parties (to the conflict) in meeting their commitments to release all conflict-related detainees."²⁶

Since the Stockholm Agreement, hundreds of detainees have been exchanged - in the framework of the agreement and also as a result of unilateral initiatives - contributing to alleviating the suffering of many Yemeni families and reuniting them with their missing loved ones.

However, despite the Envoy's and the ICRC's important contributions to tackling enforced disappearances, their role is limited to "the logistical and technical aspects of the exchange"²⁷. They do not act upon cases of missing persons transmitted by families, but instead the prisoners exchanged are those identified by the parties to the conflict. This situation has caused an important deal of consternation for families and it has also been denounced by human rights organizations in Yemen²⁸ who find the criteria for selection of prisoners arbitrary and not based on an impartial assessment of the needs of detainees and their human rights concerns. Furthermore, the Envoy's Office and the ICRC provide limited support to the prisoners exchanged. Without robust psychological, legal and

²⁴ Stockholm Agreement, United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement. Available at: <https://unmha.unmissions.org/en/stockholm-agreement-0>

²⁵ Resolution 2451, adopted by the Security Council at its 8439th meeting, on 21 December 2018. Available at: [https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2451\(2018\)](https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2451(2018))

²⁶ Statement by the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Yemen at the conclusion of the tenth meeting of the Supervisory Committee on the implementation of the detainees' release agreement, 23 December 2025. Available at: <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/en/news/statement-office-special-envoy-secretary-general-yemen-conclusion-tenth-meeting>

²⁷ <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/en/year-after-stockholm-agreement-where-are-we-now>

²⁸ See Nadwa Dawsari, "Yemen's prisoner exchange must be de-politicized", Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, November 10, 2020 (<https://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/11881#:~:text=Yemen's%20Prisoner%20Exchange%20Must%20be,a%20Center%20For%20Strategic%20Studies>); "Released and exiled: torture, unfair trials and forcible exile of Yemenis under Houthi rule", Amnesty International (2021) (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/MDE3139072021ENGLISH.pdf>).

economic support, released detainees remain in a very precarious situation and are left to face insurmountable challenges on their own, namely stigma, unemployment and mental health issues just to name a few. Finally, neither the Envoy nor the ICRC have managed to connect the exchanges of detainees with Yemen's aspirations for a future transitional justice process. Even though the exchanges have helped reunite hundreds of families with missing relatives, families and those formerly detained remain entitled to knowing the truth about the circumstances of the enforced disappearance and to reparations for the violation and the suffering the disappearance caused, amongst other transitional justice measures. The Office of the Special Envoy for Yemen and the ICRC have also not significantly contributed to any commemorative practices and memorialization initiatives about enforced disappearances. The main reason for this is the lack of acknowledgment of the relationship between prisoner exchanges and enforced disappearances. Even though the Special Envoy's Office is adamant about the positive role that prisoner exchanges play with regards "easing the suffering of detainees and their families,"²⁹ linking the exchanges to the broader issue of enforced disappearances would resonate very strongly in Yemeni society particularly considering the lack of political recognition and in some instance denial of disappearances and missing persons by the country's political class. Additionally, it also presents an opportunity to strengthen the linkage between the two and support efforts to clarify the fate of the disappeared and bring relief and solace to thousands of families in Yemen.

b. Engagement with Special Procedures mandate-holders

Visits by UN Special Procedures mandate-holders are critical to supporting memorialization efforts for enforced disappearances, as they help identify gaps in countries' legislation and in other relevant frameworks, areas that would benefit from technical capacity-building, strengthen dialogue with government officials and civil society actors and maintain international pressure. However, access to Yemen remains highly constrained due to political, social and territorial fragmentation. The last visit conducted by a Special Procedures mandate holder to Yemen was in October 2003³⁰. Due to the absence of any visits by the Special Procedures for over 20 years, many human rights issues have stayed in the shadows and gone undetected. Human rights have also suffered from a lack of international scrutiny and monitoring and many issues remain severely under-reported - which is the case with enforced disappearances. Even though some Special Procedures mandate holders have sent a formal request to the government to visit Yemen - namely after 2014 - the number of attempts appears insufficient given the gravity of the human rights situation in the country. For instance, the last known visit

²⁹ See supra no. 23.

³⁰ The Independent Expert on Extreme Poverty visited Yemen from 2 until 5 October 2003. See "Report submitted by the Independent Expert on Extreme Poverty", E/CN.4.2004/43/Add.1, 8 January 2004.

request made by the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances was at the end of 2017. The government of Yemen has not responded to any requests made. The only exception is the Panel of Experts of the Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council. The Panel was established in 2014 pursuant to UNSC resolution 2140. Since its establishment and with very few exceptions, the Panel has been able to visit government controlled areas of Yemen on a regular basis and in few instances the country's capital Sana'a. All thirteen reports issued by the Panel of Experts since 2015 have included references to the issue of enforced disappearances. The Panel has found that all parties to the conflict in Yemen have committed violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including enforced disappearances³¹.

To address these challenges, the UN should increase its dialogue with the government in Yemen in order to establish a working relationship with the relevant national authorities and institutions in the realm of disappearances and support their efforts to document and memorialize enforced disappearances accordingly. This important step can also contribute to putting in place a process - for instance, an action plan - that brings Yemen closer to the goal of ratifying the ICPPED. Building a strong working relationship with key national authorities in Yemen - based on a constructive and frank dialogue with the latter, on strengthening their technical capacities and on the active participation of Yemeni civil society and families of the missing - can also be instrumental for purposes of facilitating in the future access to Yemen for the WGIED as well as for other special procedures mandate holders.

Effective engagement with special procedures has been impacted by accessibility challenges, as scarce circumstantial information on enforced disappearances have made detailed reporting requirements difficult at times. A number of CSO including families in Yemen have reported several difficulties with the WGEID submission forms for information on cases of enforced disappearances. The forms require a high level of detailed information – such as the exact location of disappearance, the identity of witnesses and detailed circumstances – which are difficult for families and communities to provide. In Yemen, ongoing instability and a volatile security environment have significantly limited the ability of affected individuals and organizations to obtain or verify such information. As a result, the few reporting mechanisms available to Yemeni families and organizations risk becoming effectively inaccessible. Families and CSOs are keen to provide accurate and credible information and do not wish to submit incomplete accounts. However, there is a need for greater flexibility from the Special Procedures in recognizing that, in many cases, certain details are simply unavailable due to the context in which enforced disappearances occur.

³¹ See "Letter dated 22 January 2021 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen addressed to the President of the Security Council", S/2021/79, 25 January 2021.

c. Support for Digital Memorialization

Given restrictions on public assembly, families and CSOs have emphasized the importance of archiving and digital memorialization as essential tools to document enforced disappearances that are otherwise denied, silenced or contested by the parties to the conflict in Yemen. Digital records preserve victims' experiences and can serve as evidence in criminal proceedings, truth-seeking mechanisms, reparations programs and guarantees of non-recurrence. As noted in the 2023 report of the WGEID on new technologies, digital tools present both risks and opportunities, including misuse against families of the disappeared and human rights defenders, as well as their potential to advance searches for the disappeared, transitional justice and memorialization. In Yemen's context, there is a significant need and desire for a secure digital memorialization platform to preserve families' stories, prevent erasure and sustain advocacy for truth regarding the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared.

4. To what extent can forms of backlash against memorialization be seen as manifestations of State denial?

Backlash against memorialization in Yemen reflects a broader pattern of State denial, as it seeks to silence victims, erase evidence and prevent public recognition of enforced disappearances. In a context where multiple authorities and armed groups hold power and territorial control, efforts to intimidate families, restrict commemorations and suppress documentation serve to control the narrative and avoid accountability. Such actions reflect a deliberate strategy to deny the existence of violations and block truth, justice and memory from emerging. Memorialization is powerful and that is why it is viewed as a threat; when it is attacked or undermined in Yemen, it reflects an active process of denial, not only of specific cases, but of the very existence of enforced disappearance as a systemic practice.

In addition to that, it is rare to find memorialization sites in Yemen that recognize the suffering of victims (all, not some) independently of their political background or of the perpetrator of the violation(s). Memorialization is extremely politicized and efforts in this realm are led by political actors who honor the memory of those they identify with – but not with others. Moreover, political actors in Yemen tend to memorialize martyrs – and not victims. A martyr is someone who has surrendered his or her life in defense of the greater good. Since 2014, who a martyr is depends on parties to the conflict and political

actors and on their “conflict narratives”. The fact that there is no definition in Yemen’s legal system of victim of international human rights law and of international humanitarian law creates additional obstacles for memorialization activities. Past attempts to define “victimhood” in the country – for instance, those that took place during the National Dialogue Conference (2013-2014) – were unsuccessful because of disagreements between key political actors about which time periods should be recognized as “grievous”. The situation is more complicated in the case of persons who have been forcibly disappeared because disappearances in Yemen are not connected to any specific temporarility but instead are widespread and have occurred more and less intermittently since the establishment of the republic in 1962. In addition, forcibly disappeared persons are generally not considered martyrs and with some exceptions they are not entitled to pensions, funds and other types of social security schemes otherwise available to “martyrs”. The lack of social security protection extends to detainees who are released in prisoner exchanges. According to the available information, once released, former detainees – including those who had been forcibly disappeared – receive limited support including financial one. This is symptomatic of a lack of recognition of forcibly disappeared persons which in turn also has a negative impact on memorialization activities since memorialization is based on a recognition of the person who has been forcibly disappeared.

C. Conclusion and recommendations: resisting erasure and preserving memory about enforced disappearances in Yemen

Enforced disappearances in Yemen are a recurrent issue that has caused excruciating pain and suffering to thousands of families in the country and has created deep fissures in Yemeni society. The issue of missing persons in Yemen is also one of the greatest obstacles to peace and reconciliation in the country. The memorialization of enforced disappearances acquires in this situation renewed importance because it constitutes an act of recognition of a conduct which has been criminalized under international law and also because of the deep resonance this recognition carries for the families of missing persons. This submission has highlighted the importance of increasing international support - namely from the United Nations - to address in an effective manner the continuing phenomenon of enforced disappearances in Yemen. The submission has also called for a more sustained and regular engagement between the United Nations - in particular the WGIED and other relevant Special Procedures Mandate Holders - and the relevant national authorities in the country to work together on setting a national agenda and a comprehensive process to address the issue of enforced disappearances including memorialization of the missing. Below an effort is made to summarize the main recommendations:

1. Enable technical collaboration with the Ministry of Legal Affairs in Yemen and other relevant national institutions with a view to supporting Yemen's ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearances;
2. Increase collaboration with Yemeni civil society organizations including with victims of enforced disappearances and families of missing persons with a view to supporting the latter's efforts to establish institutional frameworks that address the issue of missing and disappeared persons in Yemen.
3. Engage with the Office of UN Special Envoy for Yemen to address the link between enforced disappearances and the Special Envoy's efforts on prisoner exchanges and the arbitrary detention of UN personnel. Support a joint briefing with the Special Envoy to the Security Council on this issue, following the precedent set in 2021 when the WGEID joined the UN Special Envoy for Syria in briefing the Council.³²
4. Support the creation of accessible online courses on the missing and forcibly disappeared in Yemen, drawing on the example of Lebanon where similar courses were made possible through funding of member states and technical assistance from UN agencies, including OHCHR. Such courses or curricula could integrate human rights, historical context and the experiences of victims' families, helping to preserve collective memory and educate future generations. These tools can be developed in partnership with civil society.³³
5. Consider inviting civil society representatives from Yemen to the presentation of the thematic report on enforced disappearances and memorialization to the Human Rights Council in September 2026.
6. Advocate for the establishment of a national independent mechanism on the missing and forcibly disappeared. To be credible and sustainable, the mechanism must be fully independent, including in its governance and funding structure. Establishing a diversified funding model, such as an independent fund supported by multiple funders, would help safeguard the mechanism from undue influence and ensure continuity of its work.
7. Sustained support to civil society organizations remains vital. Well-resourced and protected CSOs are better positioned to sustain their work and operate more effectively. Adequate funding and institutional support enable families'

³² See "Letter dated 17 March 2021 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the Members of the Council" (S/2021/265), 17 March 2021.

³³ UN Lebanon Country Team, "A Gender-Transformative Course on the Missing in Lebanon Strengthens Non-Recurrence," 27 January 2026. Accessible at: <https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/gender-transformative-course-missing-lebanon-strengthens-non-recurrence#:~:text=Lebanon's%20first%20Massive%20Open%20Online%20Course%20on%20the%20missing%20and,on%20the%20UN%20team's%20website.>

associations and CSOs to expand outreach and documentation, including the development of memorialization initiatives that preserve victims' memory and prevent erasure. With sufficient support, long-term memorialization and prevention initiatives through education, implementing activities in schools and community settings to promote understanding of national and international legal frameworks – including the criminalization of enforced disappearance under Yemeni law – and promote the integration of Yemen's long history of enforced disappearance in educational materials and curricula.