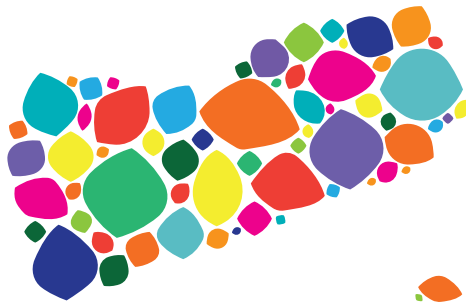




The Other Side of Aden

Ebtehal Al-Salsalehi





منتدى سلام اليمن
YEMEN PEACE FORUM

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Cover Photo : Aerial shot of Al-Ful Square in the Crater district of Aden on April 7, 2021. //Sana'a Center Photo by Ahmed Waqqas.



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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1940s, Aden has been welcoming outsiders – a factor that has made it unique among Yemeni governorates, in terms of ethnic and cultural diversity. Indians, Ethiopians, Iranians, Somalis and others have all founded communities there, with this diversity shaping the everyday life of Aden's inhabitants, while also providing it with a tradition of tolerance toward others.

This tradition continued when economic growth and then the unification of North and South Yemen boosted internal migration into the port city dramatically in the 1980s and early 1990s.^[1] Yet, since the 1994 Civil War, political developments have had a negative impact on Aden's culture of tolerance. This detrimental effect continues today, with Aden more damaged by the current fighting than at any other time in its history. The worst damage of all has perhaps been that done to its social cohesion.

As this brief outlines, social and political divisions have emerged in recent years between the residents of Aden and those coming into the city – whether those incomers have been ordinary migrants, or have been displaced by the war. As outlined below, hostile rhetoric targeting newcomers from the northern governorates has increased, while there has also been periodic violence against residents with northern origins, who have been subjected to organized deportation campaigns. Those who stand up against such discriminatory practices have also been subjected to hostility.

This brief aims to shine a light on this rising level of discrimination – a wave that has turned a city long known for its tolerance and inclusion into one now forcing people out. The purpose of focusing on this transformation is to look at what measures could be taken to deal with this discrimination and to curb its effects.

[1] Fadhl Abdullah al-Rubai'i, "Migration and Social Change in Family Structures and Functions," Abadi Center for Studies and Publication, 2010, <https://www.neelwafurat.com/itempage.aspx?id=egb252069-5267269&search=books>



METHODOLOGY

A descriptive and analytical approach has been used in researching this brief. A number of interviews with local people in Aden were conducted during June and July 2021, with the author hoping to discover why new definitions of Adeni identity, which exclude northerners, have been created, as well as the wider reasons for discrimination among members of the community.

Representatives from entities affiliated with the internationally recognized government were interviewed in order to learn more about their role in controlling and curbing discrimination. The author sought to find out what the authorities had done to ensure that the rights of civilians who had been subject to such abuses were maintained. The authors also sought to discover what plans and measures had been put in place by the authorities to maintain security and stability in the city in the face of such discriminatory practices.

Interviews were conducted with individuals directly linked to the Southern Transitional Council (STC). These were undertaken in order to find out why the current regime in Aden, represented by the STC and its military wing, was deporting civilians who had come from the northern governorates. The author also wished to ascertain who was issuing the orders forcing northerners out of the city, to what extent such deportation campaigns had achieved their objectives and their impact on Aden's social fabric.

Finally, interviews were also conducted with Yemeni civilians who had been subjected to discrimination to hear their opinions about what had happened, the justifications that they had been given by the authorities for these actions and who – in their view – had been responsible for what happened

NORTH AND SOUTH

The current discriminatory practices being carried out in Aden are not spur-of-the-actions, nor a result of the more general conflict conditions in Yemen during the current fighting. These actions are a result of what the city has gone through, along with other cities in the south, since the unification of North and South Yemen on May 22, 1990.

According to the unification agreement, Ali Abdullah Saleh (the president of North Yemen) became president of the unified country, while Ali Salem al-Beidh (the president of South Yemen) became vice president. There were shortcomings in this agreement, however, including a lack of clear and implementable provisions. This disrupted the operations of all state institutions, due to a sudden inflation in the number of civil servants, along with differences in methods for dealing with basic issues. The biggest challenge of all, however, was that the military and security forces remained structurally divided.^[2]

In December 1991, a wave of assassinations targeting officials and other prominent figures began with the attempted assassination of Omar al-Jawi. Al-Jawi was an early advocate of Yemeni unification and the founder and secretary general of the Yemeni Unionist Gathering Party, although he had grown critical of the direction the unified country was heading. While he survived the attack, his comrade, Hasan al-Huraibi, was killed.

The assassinations continued, with nearly 100 in 1992 alone,^[3] mainly targeting members of Vice President Al-Beidh's Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), the 'southern unity partner' in the unification agreement.^[4] Tensions between north and south in unified Yemen continued to rise, with attempts to alleviate this, such as the signing of the Document of Accord and Agreement in Jordan on February 20, 1994,^[5] largely failing.

[2] Mustapha Noman, "Yemeni Unity: Failure or Inability? [AR]," Independent Arabia, May 25, 2021, <https://www.independentarabia.com/node/225241/آراء/الوحدة-اليمنية-فشل-أم-عجز؟>

[3] Stephen W. Day, *Regionalism and Rebellion in Yemen: A Troubled National Union*, (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 112.

[4] Majid al-Madhaji, "On Assassinations in Yemen," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, March 5, 2017, <https://sanaacenter.org/ar/publications-all/analysis-ar/79>

[5] This was a document that represented a comprehensive vision for building a unified Yemeni state. It was drafted by the National Dialogue Committee in Yemen on January 18, 1994, and was signed in Jordan on February 20, 1994, in the presence of the president and vice president of Yemen. http://www.moqatel.com/openshare/Behoth/Siasia21/HarbYaman/sec23.doc_cvt.htm

War between northern and southern factions subsequently broke out in the summer of 1994. Fatwas were issued in the north that permitted the killing of southerners, with the most infamous of these being the one issued by Sheikh Abdulwahab bin Lutf al-Dailami, the former Yemeni minister of justice.^[6]

The north prevailed in the short-lived conflict. President Salah's forces entered Aden and on July 7, 1994, he declared victory and the end of the war. This also meant the end of 'unification' in the voluntary sense, with the north then punishing the defeated south for its attempt to secede. Some of the most important southern institutions prior to unification were destroyed by northern forces, with at least 17 factories and other buildings physically demolished. Assets, including real estate, were sold off,^[7] with Sana'a taking control of many facilities in the south.^[8]

These developments all added to a feeling of oppression among southerners, many of whom felt their country and its resources were being exploited by President Saleh's northern regime, while southerners were living in subjugation and exclusion. As anger mounted, many southerners began to see the northern victory as a foreign invasion.^[9]

As a result of further discriminatory policies, around 100,000 southern soldiers and civil servants^[10] were given early retirement after 1994, with their pensions cut. This triggered the formation in 2007 of the peaceful and nonviolent Southern Movement, which called for either core reforms to the unified state, or southern independence.^[11]

The government, however, did not listen to these demands and instead used the security forces against those making them. Human rights violations, such as extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, assaults, repression of the freedom of assembly and expression, and the detention of journalists, were among the measures used.

[6] Abdulwahab al-Dailami, radio broadcast of the fatwa, June 1994, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDgf6IoBOAc>

[7] Ali al-Qassimi, "The Facilities and Factories of the Southern State: What Happened to Them? [AR]" Al Watan Sky News, April 25, 2019, <https://alwatan.skynews.com/post/منشآت-ومصانع-دولة-الجنوب-كيف-اصبحت-اثر-بعد-عين>

[8] "Bassurrah Uncovers Important Details on the Hilal-Bassurrah Report, Saying That Its Release is Linked to Hadi and Basindowa [AR]," Yemen Press, September 21, 2012, <https://yemen-press.net/news12634.html>

[9] Mustapha Noman, "Ali Abdullah Saleh and the War in the Summer of 1994 [AR]," Independent Arabia, April 15, 2019, <https://www.independentarabia.com/node/18196/-1994-صيف-حرب-صالح-آراء-علي-عبد-الله-صالح>

[10] "In the Name of Unity: The Yemeni Government's Brutal Response to Southern Movement Protests," HRW, December 15, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/12/15/name-unity/yemeni-governments-brutal-response-southern-movement-protests>

[11] Ibid.

These actions, however, only increased the distress of southerners, along with their feeling of being foreigners in their own land. In turn, this boosted support for secessionist sentiments in the south and caused a deepening rejection of anything related to the north.^[12]

Saleh's departure from office after the 2011 uprising failed to curb the growth of these sentiments. Attempts at reconciliation by the new government of President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi, which included an apology for the 1994 war and the actions of the previous regime against southerners, also failed to calm the protests. On the contrary, demonstrations led by the Southern Movement continued, with protestors raising South Yemen flags and chanting their rejection of the government's apologies. In 2012 and 2013, mass rallies of secessionists were held in Aden on the anniversary of the founding of the South Yemen army, while on May 21, 2014, a major rally was held to mark the 12th anniversary of South Yemen's secession in 1994. Sit-ins and other protests were also held on other important anniversaries in the south, such as November 30, when South Yemen became independent from Britain in 1967.^[13]

[12] Ibid. Examples of violations that were documented by Human Rights Watch include the following: "During a May 21 protest in Aden, security forces on several different occasions opened fire without warning or provocation, wounding 23 protestors, including Nasr Hamzaiba, a former army officer and Southern Movement activist"; "On May 30, protestors marched peacefully in Shahr, demanding the release of some 75 persons detained during a protest two days earlier. When they came within meters of riot police blocking the road, police fired first into the air, but then at the protestors, killing 'Awwad Baram. The government held no inquiry into the fatal shooting."

[13] Lamya Radhi, "Yemen: A Federal State Leads to the Fall Out of Secession [AR]," SkyNews Arabia, September 2, 2013, <https://www.skynewsarabia.com/middle-east/420282-اليمن-دولة-اتحادية-وقع-انفصال>

DISCRIMINATION REVERSES DIRECTION

In July 2015, Saleh's forces and their Houthi allies, who had marched south in pursuit of president Hadi, who had fled house arrest in Sana'a for Aden, were expelled from the southern port city by popular resistance forces – an alliance of independents, Salafis, Islah party supporters, and members of the Southern Movement – and forces from the Saudi-led military coalition.

Yet, while the Southern Movement and President Hadi's internationally recognized government found themselves on the same side in the war against the Houthis, the southerners' calls for secession did not abate. In fact, these calls were subsequently strengthened by the government's general absence from Aden, which Hadi – based in Riyadh – had announced as Yemen's interim capital in March 2015.^[14] Secessionist sentiment was also bolstered by support for the STC from the United Arab Emirates, the main partner in the Saudi-led coalition, following the council's formation in 2017.^[15]

In May 2016, the first deportation campaign against civilians from the northern governorates began in Aden. More than 800 people were taken from markets and workplaces, gathered into trucks used to transport goods and taken to the border between Lahj and Taiz governorates – the old frontier between North and South Yemen.^[16]

The authorities in Aden justified these measures by saying they were only targeting people who did not have identification papers or official documents showing their place of residence. They claimed this action had also been taken in order to uncover 'sleepers' threatening the security of the city.

This justification, however, proved false, as it was later discovered that most of the

[14] "Hadi Announces Aden as the Interim Capital of Yemen [AR]," Al-Arabiya, March 7, 2015, <https://www.alarabiya.net/arab-and-world/yemen/2015/03/07/الرئيس-اليمني-يعلن-عاصمة-للبلاط>

[15] The STC was established by the Aden Declaration in May 2017, and Major General Aiderous al-Zubaidi became its president. Its establishment came as a result of a wave of dismissals by Hadi, including southern ministers and governors, with Al-Zoubaidi and Hani bin Breik being at the forefront. Bin Breik was a state minister and a commander of the Security Belt forces. The dismissals also included individuals who had responded to the call by Al-Zoubaidi to establish a new southern entity. The STC received political and financial support from the UAE, which also provided training for the STC's forces. Hussam Radman, "The South Rises Again," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, May 5, 2020, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/9829>

[16] "The Deportation of Northerners from Aden: On the Dimensions of the Policy With Flimsy Security Justifications [AR]," Yemeni Media Center, May 18, 2016, http://yemen-media.info/news_details.php?sid=18802

deportees did, in fact, have identification papers.^[17] Human rights activists also documented deported northerners' property being confiscated and their businesses closed.^[18]

Leaders within the internationally recognized Yemeni government claimed that they were not responsible for these actions and condemned the expulsion of northern civilians from Aden. President Hadi described the deportations as "unacceptable", while Prime Minister Ahmad Obaid bin Dagher characterized them as illegal and arbitrary, and called for the return of those who had been expelled.^[19] The Ministry of Interior stated that these incidents had occurred because of the unregulated relationship between the internationally recognized government and the Saudi-led military coalition. The latter, it said, had established numerous different security forces, some of which were responsible for these abuses, but none of which were not connected to the Ministry of Interior.^[20]

Nonetheless, in August 2019, a second deportation campaign was carried out. This came after an August 1 Houthi missile attack on a military base operated by the Security Belt forces, an armed wing of the STC largely supplied and trained by the UAE.^[21] The attack killed and injured dozens of Security Belt fighters, including Muneer al-Yafea, also known as Abu al-Yamamah, the commander of the Security Belt's First Support and Backup Brigade.^[22] After Al-Yamamah's funeral, the STC launched an armed assault on the internationally recognized government forces, driving them out of Aden.^[23]

Security Belt fighters reportedly targeted northerners residing in Aden in apparent

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] "Is Yemen Fragmenting? [AR]," RT, May 29, 2016, <https://arabic.rt.com/news/825237-%D9%87%D9%84-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%B8%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86>

[20] General Director of Moral Guidance and Relations in the Yemeni Ministry of Interior, Brig. Gen. Abdulqawi Ba'ish, email interview with the author, July 14, 2021.

[21] "The Southern Implosion," The Yemen Review, August 2019, Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, September 4, 2019, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/8016>

[22] "After Aden: Potential Scenarios for the New Yemen [AR]," Annabaa Information Network, September 7, 2019, <https://annabaa.org/arabic/studies/20507>

[23] "The Southern Implosion," The Yemen Review, August 2019, Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, September 4, 2019, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/8016>

revenge for the Houthi attacks, detaining, assaulting, harassing, and forcibly expelling “hundreds”, according to the UN.^[24] Armed men wearing military uniforms conducted raids alongside ordinary civilians that had gathered to look for northerners. Any that were found were rounded up and deported to Tur Al-Bahah, on the border between Lahj and Taiz.^[25]

A.K.,^[26] one of those deported in 2019, told the author that the armed men who had detained him had threatened to kill him if he did not hand over all his money and his cell phone. Along with other deportees, he was then taken to Yafa district in Lahj governorate, where the deportees were beaten with rifle butts, stabbed in the feet and threatened with being burnt, beheaded and buried alive. A.K. said that eventually he and the other deportees were released near the border with Al-Bayda governorate. There, his captors had said they would fire on a nearby Houthi forces checkpoint, so that when the Houthis responded, they would kill the deportees in the crossfire. He added that the deportees were, however, able to get to the nearest safe area, where the Houthis welcomed them.

The Support and Backup Brigades and the Security Belt forces subsequently denied that they were behind the forced expulsion of people from the northern governorates and the closing of their businesses.^[27] Yet, the government’s initial condemnation in 2016,^[28] the deportation campaign had repeated in 2019, along with the harassment of individuals from the northern governorates, even if their families had lived in Aden for three or four generations.

[24] Ravina Shamdasani, “Press Briefing note on Yemen,” Office of the High Commissioner, Geneva, August 6, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24871&LangID=E>

[25] “Houthi Government Condemns the ‘Racist’ Deportation of Yemenis from Northern Governorates and Stresses Its Preparedness to Welcome Them [AR],” Debrief, August 3, 2019, <https://debrief.net/news-10455.html>

[26] Telephone interview with a victim of the second deportation campaign in Aden, who wished to remain anonymous for security reasons, June 16, 2021.

[27] “Support and Backup Brigades and Security Belt Forces Deny Links to Aden Campaigns and Publish Phone Numbers to Report any Attack [AR],” Support and Backup Brigades Media Department, August 4, 2019, <http://alhezam-media.com/site/2019/08/04/https-wp-me-p9wgzr-1ls/>

[28] “Is Yemen Fragmenting? [AR],” RT, May 29, 2016, <https://arabic.rt.com/news/825237-هل-يتشظى-اليمن-825237/>

DISAPPEARANCES

Discriminatory measures have not been limited to the mass deportation of Yemenis with northern origins, either. They have also included unjustified detentions and enforced disappearances. These cases affect both those of southern and northern descent, indicating a wider disintegration of the rule of law and Aden's social fabric.

According to the Abductees' Mothers Association, a Yemen-based, women-led civil society group, some Aden residents whose origins are in other governorates have been detained by the Security Belt forces and other STC-affiliated groups and 'disappeared'.^[29] This means there is no record of their detention, no charges have ever been brought against them and their whereabouts are unknown.^[30]

While group spokeswoman Umat al-Salam Al-Hajj had no numbers specifically for northerners treated in this way, she said 43 people from Aden and other southern governorates had vanished in this manner. In addition, the association had a record of 40 individuals who had been detained for more than four years, while only 12 of them had been charged with a specific crime.^[31]

[29] Authors' personal interview via email with Umat al-Salam Al-Hajj, July 31, 2021.

[30] The Yemeni constitution stipulates in Article 48, Section C, that any person temporarily apprehended on suspicion of committing a crime shall be presented in front of a court within a maximum of 24 hours from the time of his detention. The judge or public prosecutor shall inform the detained individual of the reason for his detention and questioning and shall enable the accused to state his defense and rebuttals. The court then gives a justified order for the release of the accused, or for the extension of his or her detention. In any and all cases, the prosecutor is not entitled to continue detention of the accused individual without a judicial order. See "Yemen's Constitution of 1991 with Amendments Through 2015," [constituteproject.org](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Yemen_2015.pdf?lang=en), August 26, 2021, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Yemen_2015.pdf?lang=en

[31] Authors' personal interview via email with Umat al-Salam Al-Hajj, July 31, 2021.

DISCRIMINATORY RHETORIC IN GOVERNANCE AND THE MEDIA

Each wave of deportations has been accompanied by openly discriminatory rhetoric by the STC leadership.

In 2016 and 2019, Hani bin Breik, the Security Belt commander and now deputy president of the STC, made clear statements that northern citizens were not welcome in Aden, asking them not to come to the city.^[32]

This rhetoric of division and discrimination has also spread throughout the departments and institutions of the state. One example of this was provided by Ali al-Dharhani, an artist, who said he had not been allowed to go into the Aden governorate office building to request a permit for an art gallery for his work. The justification given to him by the security officer at the door was, “You are a dihbashi and are not allowed to come in here.”^[33] A ‘dihbashi’ is a pejorative term used to mock someone from a northern governorate.^[34]

Media outlets have also contributed to increasing division within Aden. Asmhan al-Als, Secretary General of the Yemeni Association of History and Antiquities, said that as there was no national and official news source, media rhetoric has only led to further divisions and more hatred.

[32] Hani bin Breik, Twitter post, “We Hope the Good People of the North Don’t Seek Refuge in the South, Particularly in Aden [AR],” August 3, 2019, <https://twitter.com/HaniBinbrek/status/1157721603779829766>; Hani bin Breik, Twitter post, “There are Celebrations in Aden, and Beverages are Being Distributed in Some Restaurants over the Death of our Martyrs... [AR],” August 3, 2019, <https://twitter.com/HaniBinbrek/status/1157719524185116678>; “Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014: Report of the detailed findings of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen,” UN Human Rights Council, September 9, 2019, https://www.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/GEE-Yemen/A_HRC_42_CRP_1.docx&action=default&DefaultItemOpen=1

[33] Ali al-Zarhani, “Artist Prevented from Entering Building of Aden Governorate over Accusation that his Origin is Northern [AR],” Aden Alghad, February 24, <https://adengad.net/public/posts/528266>

[34] The term originally comes from a character in the Yemeni television comedy series, Dihbash, broadcast between 1991 and 1993.

Indeed, all sides in the current conflict have attempted to exploit the power and security vacuum left by an ineffective government and its institutions,^[35] with media platforms often becoming propaganda tools for their respective backers – themselves parties to the fighting.^[36] Such rhetoric, Al-Als said, was not being opposed by any officials.^[37] As a result, Aden no longer has a media or political environment in which calls for peace, community tolerance and the acceptance of others can be made.

K.L., a journalist, said he had been forced to flee from Aden to Hadramawt after being harassed and threatened with arrest after criticizing STC policies. He eventually returned to Aden and has since completely stopped expressing opinions.^[38] Another journalist, a correspondent for an Arab news channel in Aden, was forced to flee the city after being targeted by individuals affiliated with the Security Belt forces, who had threatened to kill him and publicly incited others against him.^[39]

[35] "An Assessment Study of the Professional Performance of Yemeni Visual Media [AR]," Center for Studies and Economic Media, April 30, 2017, <http://economicmedia.net/?p=826>, and author's phone interview with Majed al-Daari, head of news website Observers Press, July 11, 2021.

[36] "Annual Report on Freedom of Expression in Yemen, 2020," Media Freedom Observatory Yemen, February 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/English-report-2020-1.pdf>

[37] Doctor Asmhah al-Als, Secretary General of the Yemeni Association of History and Antiquities, personal phone interview with the authors, July 14, 2021.

[38] Author's confidential phone interview with K.L., a southern journalist, July 30, 2021. K.L. wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

[39] Author's confidential phone interview with a reporter who wished to remain completely anonymous for security reasons, July 31, 2021.

PEJORATIVE TERMS

Another indicator of increased regional discrimination in Aden is a recent rise in the use of pejorative language, such as ‘dihbashi’, to describe those of northern descent.

In addition to the example of this provided by Al-Dharhani above, A.A.,^[40] a journalist from Sana’a, told the author that he had been stopped twice by Security Belt forces at checkpoints on the road from Sana’a to Aden, near the city of Al-Dhalea, in December 2015 and August 2019. Both times, the justification given was that he was a “dihbashi”. A.A. also said he would have been prevented from continuing to Aden were it not for the intervention of southerners who were traveling with him.

The discriminatory actions at checkpoints are in violation of the Yemeni Constitution, which states in Article 57 that freedom of movement from one place to another within the country is guaranteed for all citizens.^[41] It further states that movement may not be restricted, except by law, or for security and safety reasons, and that no citizen may be deported from, or denied return to, the country.

Another pejorative is the term ‘1948 Arabs’. This is used negatively to describe northerners who have lived in the south – and Aden in particular – since before independence from Britain in 1967.^[42] The term now appears on social media platforms^[43] and is used to entrench divisions.

Mugeeb al-Wasabi, an academic at Aden University, said that his scheduled ticket from Aden airport in June 2021 had been sold to another passenger for a higher price a few hours before the plane took off. When he protested to airport officials, they insulted and bullied him and threatened to tear his passport up. They had also called him a “1948 Arab”, after one official saw that his family name was from an area in northern Yemen.^[44]

[40] Authors’ confidential telephone interview with a victim of the second deportation campaign in Aden, who wished to remain anonymous for fear of reprisals, July 21, 2021.

[41] “Yemen’s Constitution of 1991 with Amendments Through 2015,” [constituteproject.org/constitution/Yemen_2015.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Yemen_2015.pdf?lang=en), August 26, 2021, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Yemen_2015.pdf?lang=en

[42] “1948 Arabs” is also the common term in the Arab world for Palestinians who live within Israel’s borders. “Arabs of 1948, an Indicator of Growing Regional Investment in Southern Governorates [AR],” Aden News Agency, June 3, 2020, <http://www.adennewsagency.com/50260/>

[43] For example, Malek al-Yazidi al-Yafei, Twitter post, “Arabs of 1948 Name Alleys, Streets in #Aden After Northern Areas and Claim They Established these Alleys... [AR],” February 7, 2017, <https://twitter.com/malekalyazidi/status/828731134867550209?lang=ar>

[44] Mugeeb al-Wasabi, personal phone interview with the authors, July 13, 2021.

CIVIL SOCIETY HAMSTRUNG

The social fabric in Aden has been badly affected by discriminatory practices.^[45] Al-Als said that everyone in the city, whether they were a southerner or had northern roots, has been impacted by the political situation and the divisions between political parties. Accusations were being traded between the government and the STC, yet no steps were being taken for the welfare of the people, she said.

Aden residents who spoke to the author in July 2021 described the city as being in a state of deterioration, in terms of services, rights and the economy, with even basic necessities no longer available. They described a city without regular water and electricity, jobs or security, due to the absence of real policing or services that took into account the rights of the inhabitants.^[46]

The ability of activists and civil society organizations to deal with negative and discriminatory practices and to oppose inciteful rhetoric has also been limited. This is due to security problems, the absence of the state, and a lack of pressure on the parties helping to spread divisive rhetoric. Some human rights activists have also been directly or indirectly involved in the political conflict, dealing with issues based on their political affiliations or the opinions of the entities financing them. This has badly impacted their credibility and effectiveness.^[47]

[45] "Media People and Specialists Recommend Immunizing Society from Hate Speech Through Critical Thought [AR]," Media Freedoms Observatory, August 8, 2021, <https://www.marsadak.org/page/406>

[46] Author's confidential phone interviews with citizens from Aden, July 15, 2021.

[47] Hiba al-Aidrus, academic and PhD researcher in Law School, Ain Shams University. Phone interview with the author, July 25, 2021.



CONCLUSION

For many years, Aden was known as 'Yemen's Smile' – a cosmopolitan city of tolerance and coexistence, accepting its inhabitants' different beliefs and backgrounds.

Now, however, a different side of Aden has appeared: one of expulsion and exclusion, as regionalist rhetoric has led to division and fragmentation. Actions against Yemeni citizens thought to be from the north have increased, as has the feeling of insecurity – despite many different security forces being present in the city. Despite this, the internationally recognized government and its institutions continue to regard the situation with indifference, issuing only weak statements or instructions, while taking no decisive steps toward a solution. This approach has only worsened the situation, accelerating Aden's decline.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the internationally recognized government:

- Enforce the rule of law, protect civilians and maintain the cohesion of the social fabric in Yemen.
- Be present on the ground to more fully understand the suffering of the people.
- Look into the injustices and abuses that have been committed by security forces affiliated with the government or the STC.
- Operationalize the police and judiciary and look seriously into the cases of individuals who are being detained or who have been forcibly 'disappeared'.
- Compensate those who have suffered material losses or whose property has been taken by people in power, whether the victims are from Aden itself or are northerners residing in the city.
- Draft and implement new laws and legislation with clear provisions that criminalize inciteful rhetoric. Punish anyone who uses such rhetoric, whether they are an individual or an institution.
- Remove all military bases from Aden and restore civilian life to the city.
- Focus on education and adapting curriculums to raise awareness about the importance of unifying rhetoric. Promote a sense of belonging and reject racism and discrimination.

To the STC:

- As the group in power on the ground in Aden, accept the governorate's differences and diversity. Respect others, Aden's nature and its social fabric, and work to maintain it.
- Stop STC officials from adopting regionally discriminatory terms, or discriminatory political rhetoric that aims to trigger reactions amongst supporters.
- Stop extrajudicial detentions, release the names of all of detainees and forcibly 'disappeared' individuals, reveal all of the private prisons and detention centers, and end the intimidation of court and security officials and institutions.
- Quickly refer cases of individuals who have been charged to judicial authorities, while releasing those who have not been charged.
- Stop employment based on regional origins, or cronyism.

To Media Organizations:

- Adopt a balanced media discourse and do not publish or broadcast information or news that includes hateful, regionalist and discriminatory rhetoric.
- Raise awareness of the importance of laws and legislation on the publishing or broadcasting of inciteful materials. Ensure that laws that criminalize hateful rhetoric are activated and implemented.
- Encourage public and private Yemeni media channels to promote nationally inclusive rhetoric. Respect humanitarian principles and values in content disseminated on social media platforms.
- Activate the role of the press association, protect it, and mobilize it in rejecting inciteful rhetoric.
- Specify a mechanism to monitor and follow up on inciteful rhetoric published or broadcast in the media and/or on social media platforms – criminalizing this act and prosecuting anyone working to increase inciteful rhetoric.

To Local Rights Organizations and Civil Society:

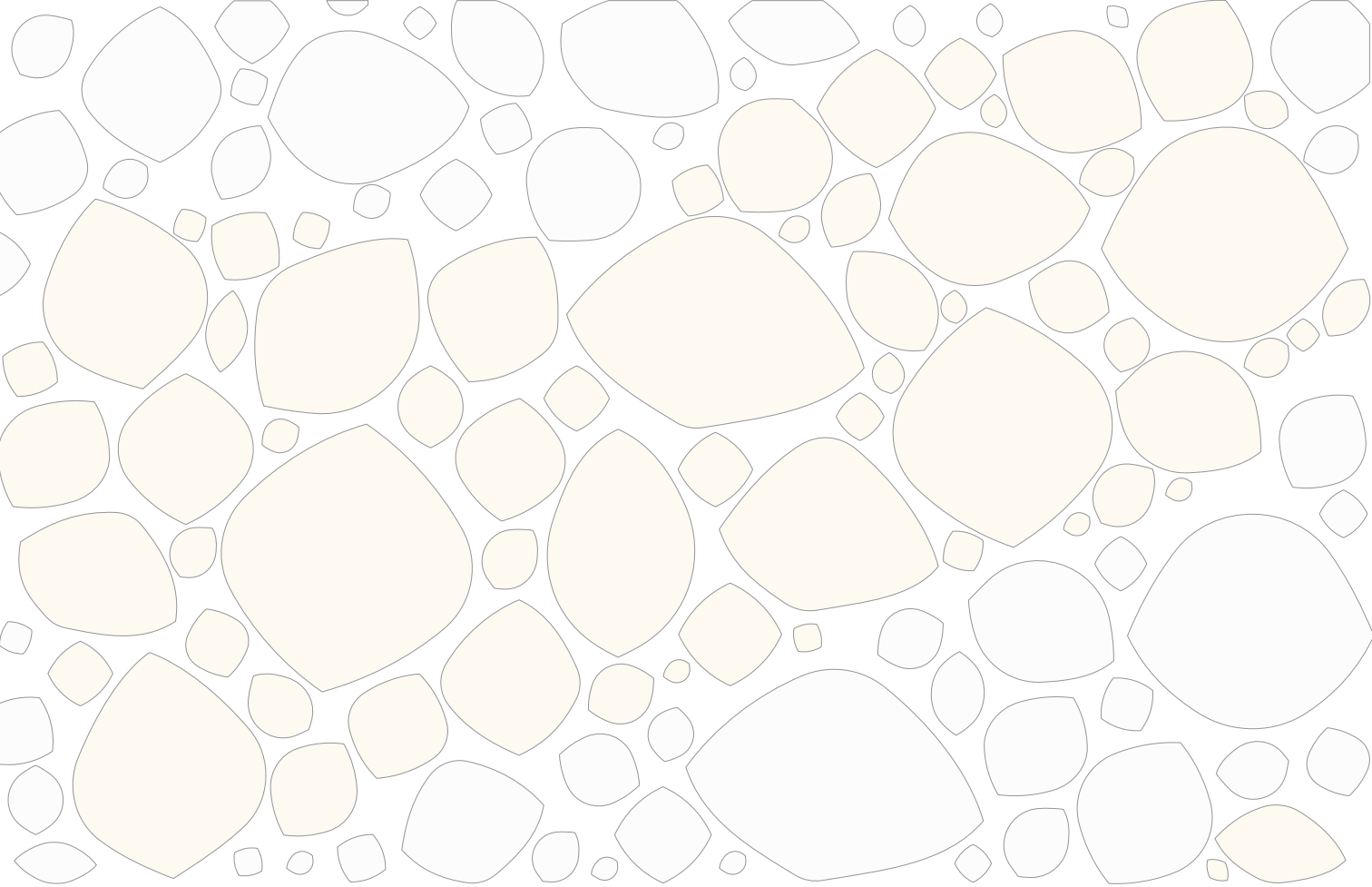
- Coordinate work with neutral international organizations to address hate speech, conduct wide-ranging outreach activities for residents to reject hateful and discriminatory rhetoric, and expand the reach of this activity to mosques, schools, universities and other institutions.
- Encourage specialized local and international organizations to provide psychological, social and legal support to victims of hate speech.
- Establish a unified database to document, monitor and follow up all violations or acts of discrimination committed by all entities in Aden.
- Conduct courses and seminars for security personnel affiliated with all sides that have a presence in Aden, to convey the importance of human rights, and rejecting discrimination, hate speech and regionalism.

To the Saudi-led Coalition:

- Take a clear position toward the political conflict dividing the internationally recognized government and the STC. Do not feed this conflict, which will only fuel additional violence.
- Distribute aid equitably between all Yemeni governorates. Provide the basic services that are needed by inhabitants to alleviate the burden of the war and the clear impact the conflict has had on Aden's infrastructure.

- Recognize the importance of halting media rhetoric that incites violence between Yemenis and is disseminated by individuals or institutions that are affiliated with the Saudi-led coalition.
- Work seriously to implement the Riyadh Agreement and ensure the return of the internationally recognized government to Aden. Help restore the control of the state, end division in the south and work to reunite differing groups around the main objective – ending the conflict and normalizing life in liberated areas, such as Aden.
- Rehabilitate and activate official media channels in Aden so that they can resume broadcasting unifying and anti-discriminatory messages in the media. Support this rhetoric so that journalists are not exposed to political polarization.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



THE SANA'A CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES IS AN
INDEPENDENT THINK-TANK THAT SEEKS TO FOSTER CHANGE
THROUGH KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION WITH A FOCUS ON
YEMEN AND THE SURROUNDING REGION

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