Civic Freedom Monitor: Yemen

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Recent Developments

While we aim to maintain information that is as current as possible, we realize that situations can rapidly change. If you are aware of any additional information or inaccuracies on this page, please keep us informed; write to ICNL at ngomonitor@icnl.org.

Introduction

Yemen has been embroiled in civil war since 2014, fracturing governance and contributing to what the United Nations has described as one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. The Houthis, also known as Ansar Allah ("Supporters of God"), control the capital, Sana'a, and much of western and northern Yemen, while the internationally recognized government operates from Aden. Although internal frontlines remained relatively static for several years under a fragile status quo, the political and military landscape shifted significantly in early 2026. The Southern Transitional Council's political influence diminished, while the internationally recognized government reestablished institutional control over Aden and several southern governorates. At the same time, regional and international tensions persisted amid continued Houthi operations in the Red Sea and subsequent U.S.-U.K. strikes.

Civic space in Yemen is highly constrained. Civil society organizations (CSOs) face extensive legal and administrative barriers to formation and operation, including intrusive monitoring and approval requirements for engagement with foreign entities. Since 2014, these restrictions have intensified as parallel authorities in Sana'a and Aden have issued conflicting directives, dissolved organizations, frozen assets, and required CSOs to obtain authorization even for routine activities. In practice, an organization's ability to operate often depends on its relationship with political actors and its willingness to submit to arbitrary controls, leaving little room for independent advocacy or watchdog activity. Laws governing public assemblies and freedom of expression also contain vague provisions that authorities can use to suppress dissent and restrict independent civic activity.

Despite these constraints, CSOs continue to play a critical role in delivering humanitarian assistance, supporting development efforts, and advocating for human rights in Yemen.

Civic Freedoms at a Glance

Organizational Forms	Associations, Civil Foundations (NGOs), and Local Community Initiatives
Registration Body	**In Sana'a:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates (for INGOs) and Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (for local NGOs) **In Aden:** Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) and Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MoSAL)

Approximate Number	Approximately 13,000 registered organizations according to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MOSAL) on 2018; however, reports indicate that the vast majority are either operationally inactive or have been replaced by "front" entities aligned with de facto authorities.
Barriers to Formation	Authorities enforce a dual-registration system; licenses issued in one area are not recognized in the other. Founders undergo intensive security vetting, and foundations must deposit significant “initial capital” as a prerequisite for licensing.
Barriers to Operations	There are several obstacles to civil society work, including the arrest of civil society workers, the obstruction of humanitarian project implementation, and travel bans imposed on women and female civil society employees.
Barriers to Resources	Acute deficit in international funding (less than 30% of needs met), coupled with stringent banking restrictions on foreign transfers. Organizations also face frozen accounts due to conflicting regulations between the two rival Central Banks.
Barriers to Expression	Journalists—both men and women—as well as media institutions have been subjected to grave violations by all parties to the conflict in Yemen. These violations range from extrajudicial killings and torture to arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance. Consequently, this has led to the severe curtailment of freedom of expression, forcing many media professionals and activists to flee the country.
Barriers to Assembly	Parties to the conflict in Yemen are suppressing peaceful protests, with the crackdown escalating to the point of killing or detaining demonstrators.

Legal Overview

This section provides a brief overview of Yemen’s legal framework for the promotion and protection of civic freedoms. Click a subheading for more, or click here to expand all subheadings.

RATIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

Key International Agreements	Ratification*
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	1987
Optional Protocol to ICCPR (ICCPR-OP1)	No
International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)	1987
Optional Protocol to ICESCR (Op-ICESCR)	No
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)	1972
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	1984

Key International Agreements	Ratification*
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women	No
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	1991
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW)	No
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)	2009

Key Regional Agreements	Ratification
Arab Charter on Human Rights	2008

* Category includes ratification, accession, or succession to the treaty

CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The current Constitution of Yemen was ratified by popular referendum on May 16, 1991, with amendments made in 2001. Relevant constitutional provisions include:

- Article (48)(a): “The state shall guarantee to its citizens their personal freedom, and preserve their dignity and their security. The law shall define the cases in which citizens’ freedom may be restricted. Personal freedom cannot be restricted without the decision of a competent court of law.”
- Article (51): “Citizens have the right of recourse to the courts to protect their rights and lawful interests. They also have the right to submit their complaints, criticisms, and suggestions to the various government bodies directly or indirectly.”
- Article (53): “The state shall guarantee the freedom and confidentiality of mail, telephone, telegram and all other means of communication, none of which may be censored, searched, exposed, delayed or confiscated except in cases specified by law and according to a court order.”
- Article (58): “In as much as it is not contrary to the Constitution, the citizens may organize themselves along political, professional and union lines. They have the right to form associations in scientific, cultural, social and national unions in a way that serves the goals of the Constitution. The state shall guarantee these rights, and shall take the necessary measures to enable citizens to exercise them. The state shall guarantee freedom for the political, trade, cultural, scientific and social organizations.”

NATIONAL LAWS, POLICIES, AND REGULATIONS

Relevant national legislation governing civil society includes the following:

- Law on Associations and Foundations (Law 1 of 2001) [English] [عربي]
- Implementing Regulations for the Law on Associations and Foundations [English] [عربي]

- Law on Cooperatives and Unions
- Law on Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorism
- Executive Statutes No. 129 for the year 2004

PENDING REGULATORY INITIATIVES

Yemen's Ministry of Legal Affairs developed a new draft CSO law in late 2014. The draft law was expected to be submitted to the government and then to Parliament in 2015 but ongoing political, security, and humanitarian crises following the takeover of government institutions by the Houthi rebels in February 2015 and subsequent military intervention by a Saudi-led coalition has stalled all legal developments.

In addition, the 17-member committee formed to draft Yemen's new Constitution completed its first draft in January 2015. In light of the political turmoil in the country, it is likely that the draft it will be significantly amended before being submitted for a public referendum. As issued in January 2015, however, the draft Constitution contains several enabling articles that pertain to freedom of association. An unofficial translation of these articles follows, below:

Article 111: Citizens have the right to create associations, foundations, and civil society organizations upon notification. In their creation, management, and operation, these organizations must adhere to the principles of democracy, good governance, and transparency of accounts, revenues, and sources of funding. The State guarantees their independence and freedom to carry out their activities, and may not halt their activities or dissolve them or their administrative bodies except upon a court order.

Article 134: Rights and freedoms contained in this Constitution shall not be disrupted, deviated from, or compromised in any way. In cases where the law provides for the development of regulations to control these rights and freedoms, such regulations shall not affect the origin of the right, or its essence or content. The regulations shall not be developed except as necessary and in order to protect the rights of others, public order, or public morals, and they shall be within the minimum necessary for these purposes, as required by the foundations of the civil democratic states, provided that they are not limited to a specific case.

Article 10: The State is committed to respecting the United Nations Charter, the League of Arab States Charter, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and to international charters and treaties ratified by the legislature, and generally recognized principles of international law.

The draft was developed with substantial opportunities for CSOs to submit their suggestions and feedback during the committee's drafting process. If the draft is adopted, it will provide a stronger constitutional basis for the protection of freedom of association and a supportive legal environment for civil society in Yemen.

Please help keep us informed; if you are aware of pending initiatives, write to ICNL at ngomonitor@icnl.org.

Legal Analysis

This section provides an in-depth assessment of Yemen's legal environment for civic freedoms, including the barriers to the exercise of the freedoms of association (formation, operations, resources), expression, and peaceful assembly. Click a subheading for more, or click here to expand all subheadings.

ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS

CSOs in Yemen can take one of two forms: associations or foundations.

The Law on Associations and Foundations (Law No. 1 of 2001) governs their establishment and operation. Under Article 2, an association is defined as: “any popular group established in accordance with this law by natural persons the least number of which is 21 persons at the time of application for the establishment thereof and 41 persons at the constituent meeting, the primary purpose of which is the realization of a common benefit for a specific social group, or to undertake activities or functions that are of a public benefit, and which does not seek from its activities to generate a financial profit for its members, and the membership of which shall be open in accordance with the conditions spelled out in the organizational procedures.”

The law does not set out separate governance provisions for foundations.

Both associations and foundations are required to register with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MOSAL) in Sana’a or its local offices in the governorates. However, due to the country’s political divisions, local organizations are now effectively required to register twice: once with the ministry affiliated with the internationally-recognized government and again with the ministry controlled by the Houthis.

According to the CSO Sustainability Index, “there are no up-to-date official statistics on the number of CSOs in Yemen. Most of these organizations work in philanthropy, while others work in social development, democracy, and human rights. However, the most recent estimates in late 2018 from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MOSAL) were that there were 13,200 registered CSOs across the country, including both active and inactive CSOs.” Most of these organizations work in philanthropy, while others work in social development, democracy, and human rights.

PUBLIC BENEFIT STATUS

Law No. 1 of 2001 allows associations to be established for either mutual (group) benefit or public benefit purposes, while foundations are required to pursue public benefit purposes.

Under the law, all associations and foundations are entitled to certain tax exemptions. These include exemptions from customs fees on imports necessary for their work, as well as on gifts and grants from overseas, subject to approval by the Minister of Finance. Article 18 of the law obliges the government to provide financial and material support to associations serving a public benefit. However, the law neither defines what constitutes “public benefit” nor establishes a process for CSOs to obtain public benefit or tax-exempt status.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Yemeni laws generally support civic participation in public life. The Constitution guarantees access to information, and citizens are, in principle, permitted to engage in public affairs. In practice, civic participation faces significant constraints.

Awareness of the right to participate remains very limited. Only a small segment of the population—primarily activists, politicians, and media professionals—are aware of available participation mechanisms, while the majority of citizens remain uniformed due in part to low literacy rates. The government has not undertaken efforts to publicize available mechanisms or to facilitate citizen engagement.

While Yemeni law, including the Criminal Procedure Code, allows citizens to submit communications to the police or public prosecution if there are violations of Yemeni laws, authorities frequently target activists who attempt to use these mechanisms. Journalists encounter additional restrictions under the Press and Publications Code No. 25 of 1990, which contains numerous provisions limiting their work and exposing them to legal liability.

Although many government bodies formally encourage associations to participate in the formulation of laws and policies, such engagement is largely symbolic. Associations are generally expected to endorse government proposals rather than offer independent input. As a result, opportunities for meaningful

participation in public policy making remain limited.

Since the Houthis gained control in Yemen's northern provinces, restrictions on women's freedom movement have further undermined civic participation. Women in Houthi-controlled areas are prohibited from traveling without a male guardian or written approval from a male guardian submitted to the Ministry of Interior in Sana'a. These requirements have significantly hampered women's ability to participate in community activities.

BARRIERS TO FORMATION

Under Law No. 1 of 2001, an association must have at least 21 members at the time of application and 41 at its inaugural meeting. Implementing regulations require associations to deposit one million Yemeni rials (approximately USD 700$ in Aden – 1900 $ in Sanaa) in a bank account before they can register.

In 2021, registration forms were updated, further complicating the licensing process for CSOs. Organizations are required to provide detailed information, including staff data and bank account details. While some of these requirements are grounded in the law, others lack a clear legal basis.

Forms and procedures vary significantly between Sana'a and Aden, and CSOs registered in one area are not recognized in the other, effectively forcing them to establish headquarters in both areas. This dual registration process has placed a heavy financial and administrative burden on CSOs, making it more difficult for them to operate.

BARRIERS TO RESOURCES

Under Law No. 1 of 2001, CSOs may receive funds from foreign persons or entities "with the knowledge of the Ministry" (Article 23(1)). The law's implementing regulations require CSOs to provide the Ministry with detailed information on the source and purpose of foreign funds, but they do not specify the procedures for notification. More generally, associations and foundations are permitted to receive resources from governmental or non-governmental actors, provided such funding "does not conflict with the effective applicable law." (Article 39(2))

In April 2010, the House of Representatives adopted the Law on Money Laundering and Combating Terrorism, which introduced additional constraints on organizations funded by international parties. Despite minor amendments during its passage, the law contains provisions that can negatively impact CSOs. For example, it authorizes a committee within the Central Bank to examine and inspect bank accounts without prior notice, and to suspend any company or organization operating in Yemen for 24 hours—with the possibility of extending the suspension up to one month—without following standard legal procedures.

The procedures for CSOs based in Sana'a to access external funding have changed. In 2019, the Supreme Council for Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and International Cooperation (SCMCHA) replaced the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation as the entity responsible for coordination related to foreign funding of CSOs. Although the Houthis later abolished this body and transferred its responsibilities to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Social Affairs, they continued to impose restrictions on the work of CSOs.

In addition, the Sana'a authorities have imposed limits on the scope of CSO activities, prohibiting projects related to peace, advocacy, and gender. These restrictions have drastically reduced funding opportunities for organizations working in these areas, leading to a shortage of resources and forcing some CSOs to scale back or halt their programs.

BARRIERS TO OPERATIONS

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor has extensive authority to monitor and restrict the activities of associations in Yemen. Notably, Law No. 1 of 2001:

- Requires a representative from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor to supervise the association’s internal elections;
- Does not guarantee associations the right to develop their own internal regulations;
- Requires all associations to submit annual reports to the Ministry in order to renew their licenses;
- Grants the Ministry the authority to audit an association’s funding sources and expenditures;
- Empowers the Ministry to question associations about their activities and financial matters.

As a result of the outbreak of armed conflict in Yemen in September 2014, two rival authorities were formed: a Houthi-affiliated government based in Sana'a and the Internationally Recognized Government based in Aden.

In the areas controlled by the Ansar Allah (Houthi) movement's government, beginning in early 2019, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor of the Sana'a government began reviewing the work of civil society organizations (CSOs) to determine whether they could retain their operating licenses. Civil society advocates viewed these measures as a way for the Houthis to reduce the number of CSOs operating in Sana'a and other areas under their control.

The group also took other measures—including freezing the bank accounts of certain CSOs, halting the issuance of licenses, and changing the boards of directors of some organizations to include individuals loyal to the group—with the aim of restricting civic space.

In 2019, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor dissolved around 100 CSOs under the pretext of having "suspicious objectives," and announced that only 400 out of 13,000 registered CSOs were active. It also stated that it would adopt a new mechanism enabling it to determine which CSOs work in the national interest.

In view of the increasingly complex and severe practices by the authorities toward CSOs—which include the improper use of legal procedures, security pressure on organizations, and the arbitrary use of CSO data—some organizations suspended their activities in certain locations. For instance, the International Organization for Migration closed its office in Al-Hodeidah Governorate.

The Houthi-affiliated Supreme Council for Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and International Cooperation (SCMCHA), which was subsequently dissolved, issued several resolutions restricting CSO activities and causing organizations to suspend projects or close their offices. These resolutions include:

- Resolution No. 2060 (2020), which requires CSOs' projects and draft sub-agreements to be reviewed by the General Secretariat of SCMCHA.
- Resolution No. 56 (2021), which prohibits CSOs from conducting activities via their websites or holding virtual meetings, workshops, or symposiums without coordinating with SCMCHA. It also requires CSOs to obtain permission from the Council to use their staff to implement their work or conduct studies. Non-compliance may result in the organization being shut down or expelled from the country.
- Resolution No. 805 (2021), which limits CSO operations to specific geographic areas, with nationwide licenses available exclusively from the headquarters of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. Without a nationwide license, an organization operating in more than one governorate risks suspension.

During the first quarter of 2026, harassment of CSOs and their personnel continued in Sana'a. Notable

incidents included the raiding of six United Nations offices and the headquarters of Doctors Without Borders (MSF).

In areas controlled by the Internationally Recognized Government, starting in 2020, CSOs headquartered in Sana'a or whose founders are from northern regions struggled to obtain licenses from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor's office in Aden. As a result, many CSOs were forced to open new headquarters in Aden or operate through other organizations.

In addition, in late 2021, the Ministry's office in Aden issued a number of resolutions and circulars imposing additional legal and technical control over CSO activities in Aden:

- A circular issued in October 2021 requiring licenses to be issued exclusively from the Ministry's headquarters in Aden, effectively forcing CSOs to establish offices and bank accounts in Aden.
- Circular No. 2 (2021) regulating the membership of cooperative associations based on the National Associations and Federations Law No. 1 of 2001 and its Executive Statutes No. 129 of 2004. According to Article 21-4 of the Law, a member of an association should not be a member of another association conducting similar activities.
- Circular No. 1 (2021) warning national associations and foundations operating in Aden not to implement any activities without prior approval and confirming that legal action would be taken against violators in accordance with Law No. 1 of 2001 and its Executive Statutes No. 129 of 2004.

Additional directives established procedures for renewing annual licenses. To renew its annual license, a CSO must provide:

- An administrative report for the previous year;
- A financial report approved by a chartered accountant in Aden covering the organization's activities, bank accounts, and sources of funding;
- A lease for the organization's headquarters in Aden; and
- A detailed annual activity and project plan for the upcoming year along with sources of funding.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor further confirmed that national and cooperative associations must hold their electoral meeting in coordination with the Ministry's office in Aden following the expiration of the board of directors’ three-year term.

In Aden, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor also issued several directives prohibiting engagement with certain CSOs within territories controlled by the Internationally Recognized Government (IRG), specifically through Circular No. 3 of 2025 and Decree No. 1001 of 2025. Furthermore, the Ministry issued a circular to all its branches in IRG-controlled regions, stipulating that no licenses shall be granted to any organization, association, or union without the Minister's prior and explicit approval.

Anti-Money Laundering and Counterterrorism Measures

The 2010 Law on Money Laundering and Combating Terrorism allows a committee within the Central Bank to:

- Examine and inspect bank accounts without prior notice.
- Suspend any organization’s activities for 24 hours, with a possible extension up to one month, without following standard legal procedures.

Extralegal Harassment and Security Pressures

Beyond legal restrictions, CSOs face harassment by the parties to the conflict in Yemen, including arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings of personnel, misinformation campaigns, and corrupt practices. These pressures have significantly constrained civic space since the war began, forcing some CSOs to suspend operations.

In May 2024, Houthi forces raided multiple CSO offices, arbitrarily detained staff members, and subjected them to enforced disappearances, further deteriorating the operating environment for local organizations.

Barriers to International Contact

Article 23 of Law No. 1 of 2001 requires associations and foundations to obtain prior approval from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor before conducting activities “on the request or assignment of a foreign entity.” The implementing regulations for the law mandate CSOs to submit an application detailing the foreign entity’s name, address, nationality, purpose, geographic scope, and the nature and goals of the proposed activities. While the Ministry is required to review and respond to the application within 30 days, the regulations do not further define which types of activities are encompassed by this requirement, nor do they provide CSOs the right to appeal if their application is denied.

Since the outbreak of war in late 2014, the parties to the conflict in Yemen have imposed additional controls on CSO activities involving international organizations.

In the last quarter of 2016, a new regulation required CSOs to consult with the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) before submitting funding proposals to international agencies and to obtain MoPIC’s approval before entering into agreements with international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). All new CSO projects with INGOs must align with MoPIC’s program plans. Certain activities, such as surveys, also require advance approval. In mid-2017, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs introduced further requirements obliging CSOs to submit detailed forms containing extensive information about their planned activities.

In Houthi-controlled areas, project funding proposals from local CSOs are no longer sent to external entities via MoPIC. Instead, they were routed through the Supreme Council for Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (SCMCHA). In January 2021, the authorities in Sana'a issued a circular prohibiting CSOs from participating in activities with foreign entities without prior permission from SCMCHA, which was later dissolved, after which its responsibilities were transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

CSOs in Sana'a face growing scrutiny over their online presence and international communications. Organizations that use their websites to engage donors or the international community, or that conduct virtual workshops with external entities, risk being placed on the "List of Suspicious Organizations" serving foreign agendas. Organizations placed on this list risk having their staff targeted and facing significant restrictions on their activities.

Following the arbitrary detention of staff from international and local organizations and the storming of numerous CSO offices by Houthi forces in May 2024, local organizations in Sana'a have become increasingly wary of accepting support from international donors. Fear of being labeled as "spies" for foreign entities has further constrained their ability to operate and engage internationally.

BARRIERS TO EXPRESSION

While Yemen’s legal framework does not impose explicit restrictions on freedom of expression or advocacy, in practice, freedom of expression is curtailed. Human rights defenders frequently face severe violations by the parties to the conflict in Yemen.

Since seizing control of Sana’a in 2014, the Houthis have systematically targeted journalists, human rights activists, political dissidents, and others voicing criticism of their rule, and have forcibly closed the

headquarters and offices of major local and press agencies. Similarly, the Internationally Recognized Government (IRG)—which controls Aden and vast areas of southern Yemen—has targeted journalists and other critics in territories under its control.

Notable incidents of pressure and harassment against journalists include:

- In May 2023, freelance international journalists Quentin Müller and Sylvain Mercadier were arrested without a warrant; their apartment was searched, and their equipment and passports were seized. After being taken to a police station for questioning, they were placed under house arrest for a week and subsequently forced to leave the country. Müller had reported on the political situation on Sokotra Island for several publications, whereas Mercadier appears to have been arbitrarily arrested due to his association with Müller.

- In June 2023, authorities in Marib issued arrest warrants for the editors of three news outlets and the bureau chiefs of two broadcast networks over their coverage of corruption issues.

- In August 2023, security forces in Taiz detained Jamil Al-Samat for his social media posts criticizing the performance of government security forces. He had been arrested just one month earlier after military leadership in Taiz filed complaints against him.

- In August 2024, the Supreme Judicial Council in Aden established a specialized prosecution for press and electronic publishing. This step followed social media campaigns criticizing a prominent judge and member of the Council.

- In May 2026, Wissam Qaid, Acting Director of the Social Fund for Development, was assassinated by an unknown group in the temporary capital, Aden, with investigations yet to identify those responsible. In June 2026, journalist Mohammed Aydah, who worked for Al Arabiya and Al Hadath channels, was assassinated in Hadhramaut Governorate—under the control of the Internationally Recognized Government—and investigations have likewise failed to identify his assassins.

The Yemeni Journalists' Syndicate has highlighted that female journalists face unique challenges, including fewer professional opportunities and heightened self-censorship as a result of political, cultural, and social pressures.

The Houthis have established their own "judicial system" that enables them to oversee judges and appoint loyalists to judicial positions. CSOs consider these judicial amendments unconstitutional, viewing them as a means to consolidate Houthi control over the judiciary. This system has increasingly been used as a tool to suppress independent voices, settle political scores, and eliminate political opponents.

BARRIERS TO ASSEMBLY

Legal Restrictions

Public assemblies in Yemen are regulated by Law No. 29 of 2003 on the Organization of Marches and Assemblies. Article 3 of the Law states that "every citizen in Yemen, every political party, every public organization, every trade union and syndicate has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly including peaceful demonstrations and marches in compliance with the constitution, the provisions of this law and the applicable laws."

While this provision recognizes the right to peaceful assembly, it improperly limits the right by excluding non-citizens.

Vague Provisions

Vague provisions in Law No. 29 give authorities excessive discretion to ban or interfere with public assemblies. For instance, Article 16 prohibits demonstrations or marches "that target the Republican

system, homeland security, or the unity of [Yemen's] territories." The vagueness and breadth of these provisions allow authorities to bar virtually any demonstration or march that it does not support. Article 5 permits authorities to reschedule an assembly's timing or change its route within 24 hours of its start, citing "security reasons" or "necessity." These terms are undefined and can be interpreted expansively to justify undue interference, even at the last moment.

Advance Notification

Under Article 4, organizers must provide the Ministry of Interior with 72 hours' notice before holding any demonstration or march. This period exceeds the 48-hour limit recommended by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association.

Although Article 4 allows organizers to appeal rescheduling decisions to a court, the process is constrained. Appeals must be made within 24 hours, and courts must decide within 72 hours. The court's decision is considered final.

Law No. 29 does not explicitly recognize spontaneous assemblies. Combined with the advance notification requirement, this omission suggests that such gatherings may be treated as prohibited. However, Article 19 states that "The provisions of this law do not apply to protests and sit-ins that do not turn into a demonstration or a march." Thus, this provision could potentially allow for certain spontaneous gatherings on a smaller scale.

Enforcement

In practice, Yemeni authorities have repeatedly used excessive force to suppress peaceful protests. In 2021, Yemeni security forces and the Southern Transitional Council used live ammunition to disperse peaceful demonstrations in Aden and Hadhramout protesting the deteriorating security conditions. The crackdown left two people dead and several wounded. Authorities declared a state of emergency, disregarding constitutional protections for peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. In September 2024, Houthi forces abducted a journalist shortly after he criticized their rule. This incident occurred amid a wider Houthi campaign of intimidation against activists and public figures who called for celebrations marking the anniversary of the September 26 Revolution.

Additionally, during the first quarter of 2026, the Internationally Recognized Government (IRG) suppressed protests called for by the Southern Transitional Council (STC) in Yemen's southern governorates, resulting in fatalities among the demonstrators.

Additional Resources

This section contains links to external reports and news reports relevant to civic freedoms. The Historical Notes section contains links to past developments which ICNL has reported on. Click a subheading for more, or click here to expand all subheadings.

GLOBAL INDEX RANKINGS

Ranking Body	Rank	Ranking Scale (best – worst possible)
UN Human Development Index	184 (2023)	1 – 193
Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index	177 (2025)	1 – 182

Ranking Body	Rank	Ranking Scale (best – worst possible)
Freedom House: Freedom in the World	Status: Not Free Political Rights: 1 Civil Liberties: 9 (2025)	Free/Partly Free/Not Free 40 – 0 60 – 0
Fund for Peace Fragile States Index	6 (2024)	179 – 1

REPORTS

UN Universal Periodic Review Reports	Yemen UPR page
UN Human Rights Reports	Yemen
Konrad Adenauer Foundation (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung)	Perspectives on the role of Yemen's CSOs in the current civil war (2021)
U.S. State Department	Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2024: Yemen
Fund for Peace Fragile States Index Reports	Foreign Policy: Fragile States Index
Fund for Peace	Fund for Peace archives: Yemen
IMF Country Reports	Yemen and the IMF
International Commission of Jurists	Yemen archives
International Center for Not-for-Profit Law Online Library	Yemen

NEWS

Assassination of Social Fund Official in Aden is a Terrorist Message Targeting Developmental Work (May 2026)
The Chairman of the Defend Foundation for Rights and Freedoms, lawyer Huda al-Sarari, condemned the killing of Wissam Qaid, the Acting Executive Director of the Social Fund for Development (SFD) in the city of Aden. This occurred hours after he was kidnapped by unidentified gunmen in front of his home; his body was later discovered inside his car under what were described as bloody circumstances. Al-Sarari stated that this crime cannot be viewed as an isolated incident. Rather, it represents a clear message of intimidation targeting everyone involved in reconstruction and development efforts in the country.

Apparent Excessive Force Against Protesters (March 2026)
Yemeni government-aligned forces appeared to have used excessive force against protesters, as well as arbitrarily detained some protestors in February, Human Rights Watch said. Throughout February 2026, there were several protests in support of the Southern Transitional Council (STC). Human Rights Watch investigated protests that took place in three governorates of Yemen: Aden, Shabwa, and Hadramout. Government forces reportedly killed at least six people and injured dozens in these clashes with protesters in Aden and Shabwa, and detained dozens of people in Hadramout.

Yemen's Houthis abduct at least 4 journalists (June 2025)

The Committee to Protect Journalists condemns Houthi rebels' abduction of at least four Yemeni journalists and media workers in the western port city of Hodeidah, and the sentencing of journalist Mohamed Al-Miyahi to 1½ years in jail for criticizing the group's leader.

Aden authorities impose protest ban (May 2025)
The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) and the Yemen Coalition for Human Rights (YCHR) condemn the recent imposition of a sweeping ban on public protests, enacted May 17 by authorities in Aden. This unlawful measure represents a clear violation of fundamental human rights, particularly the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, as enshrined in both the Yemeni constitution and international legal standards.

Yemen's Houthis seize UN rights office in Sanaa (August 2024)
Yemen's Houthi rebels stormed the headquarters of the United Nations' Human Rights Office in the capital, Sanaa, seizing documents, furniture and vehicles, a senior U.N. official said. The seizure was the latest move in a crackdown by the Houthis on people working with the U.N., aid agencies and foreign embassies. The crackdown comes as the Iranian-backed rebels have been targeting shipping throughout the Red Sea corridor over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

Huthi authorities must immediately release arbitrarily detained staff from UN and civil society organizations (July 2024)
Huthi de facto authorities must immediately release 13 UN staff and at least 14 staff from Yemeni and international civil society organizations who continue to be arbitrarily detained one month later as part of an ongoing crackdown against the human rights and humanitarian community, Amnesty International said. Early last month, Huthi security forces conducted a series of raids in Sana'a, Hodiedah and Hajjah rounding up at least 27 staff, four women and 23 men, from UN agencies and at least seven local and international organizations from their homes or offices. Huthi authorities have not disclosed the whereabouts of the detained staff to their families and they are being held incommunicado and denied their right to access legal counsel or contact their families.

Yemen's Huthi rebels say they arrested aid workers over 'US-Israeli spy network' (June 2024)
Yemen's Huthi rebels said they had arrested a "spy network" operating under the cover of humanitarian organizations, after aid workers including 11 UN staff were held last week. The Iran-backed group claimed the network was linked to the CIA and had been carrying out "espionage" activities in Yemen for years, initially through the United States embassy before it suspended operations in Sanaa in 2015. The Huthis, who are engaged in a long-running civil war that has triggered one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, did not specify how many people were arrested.

Violations and harassment facing female journalists in Yemen (March 2023)
According to Euro-Med Monitor, one out of every ten journalists arrested in Yemen over the last two years was a woman. The number of journalists arbitrarily detained in Yemen increased by 20% in 2021, reaching 488 journalists, including 60 female journalists, making it the largest number of female detainees in Yemen's history. Despite a lower number of female journalists arrested as compared to male journalists, the number of registered female journalists in Yemen is much lower than that of male journalists. Female journalists account for approximately 170 of the 1,500 journalists registered and affiliated with the Yemeni Journalists' Syndicate, making up only 11% of the total number of Syndicate-affiliated journalists. Furthermore, female journalists face several constraints, including limited opportunities and routine self-censorship as a result of cultural and social pressures.

Civil society organizations reject the Prime Minister's decision No. 3 of 2023 and demand its immediate annulment (January 2023) (*Arabic*)
Civil society organizations formed a position that is the first of its kind to record their categorical rejection of the Prime Minister's Resolution No. 3 of 2023, which they believe will eliminate any glimmer of hope for the stability of the situation in the country.

Limiting the accounts of civil society organizations in 4 banks subject to the Central Bank (January 2023) (*Arabic*)

The Director General of the Office of Social Affairs and Labor in Aden issued an order to stop opening any accounts for civil society organizations in banks that are not subject to the supervision of the Central Bank of Aden.

Minister Zaouri directs to remove the black and gray list of associations and organizations operating in the country (August 2022) (*Arabic*)
Hi Excellency Dr. Muhammad Saeed Al-Zaouri, Minister of Social Affairs and Labor, stressed the need to re-evaluate the work and programs of civil society organizations and rectify their activities.

ARCHIVED NEWS

Social Affairs and Labor "takes a number of" decisions to activate legal oversight (November 2021) *(Arabic)*

A Letter from Civil Society Organizations to the Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen (September 2021)

Yemen: Government and Transitional Council unite in suppressing protesters (September 2021)

Yemeni Civil Society and the Impact of COVID-19: A Survey of Perceptions and Responses to the Pandemic (2020)

UN official criticizes restrictions on humanitarian operations in Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen (November 2019)

International Relief and Humanitarian Organizations in Yemen (April 2019)

Prolonged detention and torture of 10 journalists illustrates risks (April 2019)

Ministry of Social Affairs stopped the work of 100 CSOs (February 2019)

Civilians at mercy of sniping, shelling and airstrikes (February 2018)

Yemen 2017/2018 Report (February 2018)

Text of the Resolution of the 36th Session in Geneva on Human Rights Violations in Yemen (September 2017)

Yemen: An "entirely man-made catastrophe" – UN human rights report urges international investigation (September 2017)

Yemen's Houthi and Saleh coalition stops UNICEF activities until further notice (February 2017)

Human Rights Report from the Yemeni Observatory for Human Rights (March 2016)

Arbitrarily Held by the Houthi (January 2016)

Huthi Armed Group Must End Crackdown On Human Rights Defenders and NGOs (December 2015)

Civil Society Key Theme at National Dialogue Conference (December 2014)

Journalists attacked, threatened amid Yemen protests (May 2013)

Human Rights Violations in the South of Yemen (December 2012)

Youth initiatives in volunteerism (November 2012)

A National Independent Human Rights Commission (October 2012)

Workshop to discuss the Law on Associations (October 2012)

CSOs agree to partake in national dialogue in Yemen (August 2012)

IIRO calls for quick relief aid to save millions of Yemenis (July 2012)

Formation of a Common Entity (May 2012)

Law on Access to Information is passed (April 2012)

Servants protest for being marginalized (April 2012)

Minister discusses draft Transitional Justice Law and Human Rights Commission with civil society (March 2012)

No immunity for Yemen's Saleh abroad: Human Rights Watch (February 2012)

Coping with unrest – aid workers turn to the community (January 2012)

UN rights council slams Yemen violations (September 2011)

U.N. accuses Yemen of using deadly force in protests (September 2011)

Targeted repression continues in Bahrain and Yemen (May 2011)

Yemen's neighbors step up role in pushing for Saleh's exit (April 2011)

UN human rights office voices concern at recent events in Yemen, Bahrain and Syria (March 2011)

In Yemen, female activist strives for an Egypt-like revolution (February 2011)

HISTORICAL NOTES

After the 2011 Revolution, Yemen launched a national dialogue process to discuss various political and social issues facing the country and agree on a binding document to form the basis of a new constitution for the nation. Following the completion of the National Dialogue Conference in January 2014, interim President Hadi announced the formation of a committee to draft a new constitution. The drafting committee, comprising 17 members, completed its first draft in January 2015. The initial drafting process included substantial opportunities for CSOs to contribute their feedback, and resulting draft articles provided a strong basis for the protection of freedom of association, among other rights. However, due to the aggravated political crisis in Yemen, the legal procedures for adopting the new draft constitution were not finalized.

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https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/yemen