

**YEMEN****HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS**

The security forces continued to exercise wide powers and to commit abuses, including arbitrary arrest, torture, and killings of civilians with virtual impunity. The press came under increasing pressure and the number of executions increased. Early in the year, unknown persons set off a series of bomb explosions in Aden and al-Dhali' province in the south, and kidnapping of both Yemenis and foreigners remained a major security issue.

A nationwide referendum in February 2001, approved constitutional amendments that strengthened the position of President Ali Abdallah Salih and his ruling General People's Congress (GPC). The parliamentary term was increased from four to six years and the president's right to decree laws when parliament was in recess was abolished but the amendments lengthened the presidential term from five to seven years, and authorized the president to appoint a 111-member Consultative Council. Opposition activists expressed concern that this body would allow the president to offset the role of the elected parliament, thus augmenting indirect executive control over legislation.

Local council elections held at the same time as the referendum, were marred by violence and opposition charges that voter registration lists had been rigged. Unofficial sources reported that some forty persons died and more than a hundred were injured in clashes with security forces and among supporters of different parties on election day and in its aftermath; the government said eleven persons were killed and twenty-three were injured. In one incident reported in the *Yemen Times*, security and military forces responded to a vote-counting dispute between the GPC and the *Islah* party representatives by opening fire indiscriminately, using heavy and medium-caliber weapons, in villages in Ibb governorate. Local people returned fire, which continued for more than three hours. Six persons died, seven were wounded and thirty-five arrested. Due to disputes over irregularities in at least twenty percent of the poll centers, final results were never officially announced. The General People's Congress claimed a comfortable majority in the councils, but opposition leaders charged that the authorities had tampered with the results of both the referendum and the local council elections.

Security forces attached to Central Security, under control of the Ministry of Interior, and the Political Security Office (PSO) which reports directly to President Salih, committed abuses with virtual impunity. In July, Abdallah Salih al-Maitami, an unsuccessful independent candidate in the Ibb local council elections, was summoned by Central Security, beaten, shackled, and had his head forcibly shaved. Two days after his arrest, on July 7, government forces entered the old city of Ibb, detained thirty-five persons apparently at random, searched nine houses without warrants, and demolished the Maitami family's house. At least fourteen of those detained were later released, eleven were held without charges as of this writing. In

August, al-Maitami and two others were brought to trial on charges of assault against security officials. They were on trial in November 2001 and incarcerated at Ibb central prison, where they were kept together with convicted criminals; al-Maitami was subject to further mistreatment.

In October, the PSO detained Abd al-Salam Nur ad-Din Hamad and Ahmad Saif, two visiting academics affiliated to the Centre for Red Sea Studies at Exeter University in the United Kingdom. During the two-day detention, they were blindfolded and beaten while being interrogated about "spying for foreign powers, and maintaining a relationship with Osama bin Laden, Israel and the separatists," the latter referring to the 1994 southern Yemeni effort to declare an independent state. Yemeni officials denied that they were ill-treated and justified the detentions as one of their "preventive measures" following the September 11 attacks in the U.S.

Police and security forces detained suspected members of radical Islamist groups throughout the year; thirty-five were arrested in December, another thirteen in January, and fifteen in June. Further arrests were carried out in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, and by late October, the *Yemen Times* reported, several hundred "Afghan Arabs" (Islamists who had returned after spending time in Afghanistan) had been picked up for questioning in Sana'a, Taizz, and Aden. Many were reportedly released within days, however. At least eight suspects in the October 2000 attack on the USS Cole were still held without charge in November, most of whom had been held well beyond the maximum six-month period permitted under the criminal code of procedure.

Despite the general climate of impunity, three police officers of the Criminal Investigation Department, Aqil al-Maqtari, Yahya al-Rub', and Husain Ghanima, were convicted in November 2000 in connection with the death in custody of Sulaiman Salih in al-Hudaida. They received three-year prison terms and were stripped of their rank and dismissed; relatives of the deceased lodged an appeal seeking to have the sentences increased. In July, eight members of the Central Security in al-Dhali' province were charged with the premeditated murder of Hamdi Salih Husain of the opposition Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP); the trial was pending at this writing.

The press came under increased government pressure as the authorities harassed journalists and embroiled opposition and independent newspapers in court battles. In April, the Ministry of Information confiscated the first issue of *Huquq al-Insan* (Human Rights), the monthly publication of "The Activists" (*al-nushata'*) human rights group ostensibly because the group had filed registration documents one week prior to publication rather than the ten days required by the press law. *Yemen Times* journalist Hasan al-Za'idi was detained by the PSO in both June and September, each time for about fourteen days, reportedly for being a distant relative of Al Za'idi tribesmen who had been involved in the kidnapping of two foreigners. No charges were filed against him.

In June 2001, the prosecution office implemented parts of a 1997 judgment passed against the opposition weekly *al-Shura* and its former editors, and suspended the paper for six months. The paper continued publication under a new license and name, but another defamation case was pending at this writing.

Defamation, which is loosely defined under Yemeni press law, was the most frequent charge levied against independent and opposition papers, both by the gov-

ernment and by private citizens; by November, cases were pending against *al-Ayyam*, *Sawt al-Shura*, *al-Umma*, *al-Ra'i al-'Amm*, *al-Wahdawi*, *al-Shumu'* and *as-Sahwa*. The press also came under attack for "inaccurate reporting." In September, the editor of Aden-based *al-Haqiqa*, Faris al-Yafi'i, was sentenced to a three-month jail term and a fine of YR 5000 (U.S. \$30) for "insulting an official" after he incorrectly reported that the governor of Aden was about to resign.

The government took action against members of the opposition Yemeni Socialist Party in al-Dhali' province, arresting members of YSP-affiliated "popular committees" after they mounted a peaceful demonstration against police and military abuses in October 2000, but did not implement its threat, made in 2000, to dissolve the party. Some YSP-affiliated journalists and military who had lived in exile since 1994 returned to the country and President Salih reportedly ordered the YSP headquarters in Ma'alla in the city of Aden to be returned to the party. Those detained in al-Dhali' by Central Security and the PSO included YSP member Fadl al-Ja'adi and journalists Ahmad Harmal and Muhammad Ali Muhsin: all three were detained in November 2000, the first two for more than three weeks on incitement charges. Authorities prevented access to lawyers during interrogation and denied family visits.

A new law of associations took effect in February 2001, empowering the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to supervise nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Registration was considered valid by default if the ministry failed to process an application within one month. NGOs were allowed to receive foreign funds upon notification of the ministry, and foreign-funded activities needed explicit approval. A minimum of forty-one members was required to establish an association. Penalties for violating any of the law's provisions entailed prison sentences of up to one year and penalties up to YR 100,000 (U.S. \$600).

The government restricted access to the Internet indirectly by monopolizing service and keeping prices prohibitively high. As in previous years, mobile phones and pagers were rendered inoperable before major occasions like national holidays.

The media reported seventy-three executions for premeditated murder between March 2001 and mid-October 2001, compared to fifty-two from mid-1998 to early 2001. A large number of other offenses carried the death penalty, among them armed banditry, apostasy, rape, and treason.

Women continued to face discrimination in personal status law. Only a male guardian could contract marriage for women who had no way to give meaningful consent. In October 2001, the cabinet referred to the parliament an amendment to the personal status law proposed by the governmental Women's National Committee to introduce a minimum age—eighteen years—for marriage. However, by November the proposal, which lacked effective safeguards to protect women from underage, forced, and polygamous marriage, had not been passed by the parliament.

## **DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS**

Local human rights groups conducted training and awareness raising workshops and lobbied successfully to remove some of the restrictions in the draft law

on associations. Local chapters of Amnesty International operated in the major cities. The government did not respond to reports of human rights violations monitored by local groups.

The Women's Affairs Support Center, a women's rights group, ran workshops on violence against women, media training, and other issues, and helped train local rights activists. The Human Rights Information and Training Center and the Arabic Sisters Forum also addressed issues related to the treatment of women by police and in prison.

Four governmental human rights bodies—the Ministry for Human Rights, the Supreme National Committee for Human Rights, and the human rights committees of the Consultative Council and parliament—continued to operate. In early October 2001, the parliamentary body, the Committee for General Liberties, published a report criticizing the use of pre-trial detention by the CID and prison overcrowding.

## **THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

### **United States**

Relations between Yemen and the United States remained strained in the aftermath of the October 2000 attack on the USS Cole in Aden harbor. The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reportedly wished to interview certain high-ranking Yemenis but President Salih told the Qatar-based *al-Jazeera* satellite television station on September 5 that “Yemen will not permit the Americans to interrogate any Yemeni citizens, whatever his capacity.” The trial of eight persons arrested in connection with the USS Cole attack continued to be postponed, reportedly at Washington's request.

Following the September 11, 2001, attacks in New York and Washington, however, U.S. law enforcement sources reported that Yemen's cooperation with U.S. investigations had improved.

U.S. economic assistance to Yemen increased from none in fiscal year (FY) 2000 to almost U.S. \$4 million in FY 2001 and \$5 million in FY 2002. Expenditures on training programs for Yemeni military officers in the U.S. doubled to \$250,000 in FY 2002. In its presentation to Congress requesting these funds, the State Department characterized Yemen as “at the forefront of the Arab world in both democratic and economic reform” and said the country had “taken significant strides toward opening its multiparty political system to full public participation, including women.” The State Department's annual human rights country reports for 2000 stated that Yemen's human rights record “continued to improve” but that problems such as torture and arbitrary detention remained. “There are significant limitations on citizens' ability to change their government,” the report said.