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## ARTICLE 19

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### Yemen: Dark Days for Yemeni Media

**ARTICLE 19 is deeply concerned about the deteriorating climate for free expression in Yemen and urges the authorities to investigate the kidnapping of journalist Salah Jalal, and lift the suspensions imposed on several independent publications and websites since early May.**

A state-run campaign to censor journalists and newspapers has been implemented for the past month. This coincides with the civil unrest unfolding in the south of the country, where citizens have been protesting poor living conditions and the government's failure to deliver on pledges for improved service and infrastructure delivery.

Intense clashes between demonstrators and government troops appear to have influenced the government's decision to suspend eight independent newspapers and block other news websites. Editors and journalists from independent publications have been blamed for allegedly fomenting secessionism and jeopardising national unity.

*“Muzzling the media and confiscating publications will not help to ease unrest,” says Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director. “On the contrary, a lack of free media can only lead to widespread discontent and rumour-mongering, and thus further anguish and discontent. We call on the Government of Yemen to protect the right of journalists to freely exercise their profession and to ensure that the print and broadcast media are able to operate without restriction.”*

In a statement issued on 25 May, *Al Share'e* newspaper warned of the dire consequences of what it described as a “hysterical campaign” against the media and pointed to its negative impact on the livelihoods of more than 200 journalists.

So far:

- Eight publications are still suspended: *Al Diyar*, *Al Share'e*, *Al Masdar*, *Al Nida*, *Al Mustaqilla*, *Al Watan*, *Al Ayyam* and *Al-Thawra*
- During May, the government issued orders to printing presses not to print any independent newspaper unless authorised
- On 4 May, the chief editor of *July 17* newspaper, Salah Jalal, was kidnapped, allegedly by civilians dressed in military outfits. He has not been released yet
- On 10 May, Yahia Bahmahfouth, blogger and owner of *hadhramautnews.net* website was detained. He remains in detention, despite appeals from his family for his release based on concerns for his health

- On 13 May, Yemeni police surrounded the popular *Al Ayam* daily and opened fire at its offices, injuring three staff
- On 18 May, popular news website *Al-Tagheer.net* was blocked by authorities. It was followed by the *hadhramautnews.net*, *YemenPortal.org*, and *yemenhurr.net* websites
- Towards the third week of May, authorities confiscated all copies of the London-based daily, *Al Quds Al Arabi*
- On 21 May, *Al Jazeera* satellite channel bureau chief, Murad Hashem, was barred from covering demonstrations in Aden and is currently under continuous surveillance by security officers. The state-run media accuses *Al Jazeera* of pursuing antagonistic political agendas, aimed at propagating secession and unrest in the impoverished country
- On 21 May, the chief editor of *Al Thawri* newspaper, Na'ef Hassan was suspended from practising journalism for one year, enforcing an old court ruling from a case filed by the defense ministry three years ago and issued in October 2008. The suspension decision also applied to the paper's former chief editor, Khaled Salman and the ruling included a fine of one million riyals (approximately US\$5,000)

In another case, former television presenter Ahmed al-Musaibli remains prohibited from working for a Yemeni satellite channel for the fourth consecutive month. His suspension followed a remark in mid-January he made during a newscast in which he praised a summit about Gaza, held in Doha which was boycotted by the Yemeni president, Ali Abdullah Saleh. Al-Musaibli said that the Doha summit had met the aspirations of the Arab people. He was immediately dismissed from his job and all related benefits were suspended. Al-Musaibili believes that the decision to suspend him was, in part, due to pressure by certain Gulf embassies and he was quoted by the *Yemen Times* saying that he received a telephone call threatening to cut off his tongue after the broadcast.

*"These are black times for Yemen," Al Jazeera Bureau chief Murad Hashem told ARTICLE 19. "The media did not create the unrest, nor is it responsible for the escalation of events. It's only reporting the facts on the ground, which is the right of all."*

The Yemeni Journalists Syndicate condemned the government's restrictive measures and called on it to honor the Deputy Prime Minister's commitment on 19 May to lift all sanctions on publications.

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Yemeni government to immediately lift the blockade on newspapers and all forms of censorship and harassment exercised against independent journalists.

#### **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.