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Middle East/North Africa - Yemen

Houthi rebellion

Journalists under attack amid Houthi rebellion in Amran province

14 August 2014

Militias and security forces targeting news providers as security crisis intensifies.

Reporters Without Borders is gravely concerned about the security situation in Yemen, in which journalists are easy prey for both sides in the armed rebellion under way in the country's northwest.

A national dialogue, concluded in January 2014, saw the drafting of the basic structure of a future federal state in Yemen. But since then, battles have broken out in greater number between Houthi rebels and the army in the north. The [conflict](#) has cost hundreds of lives and seen thousands of people displaced.

In July 2014, following fighting to control Amran province, a number of information freedom violations, including attacks, kidnappings, surveillance, and threats, have been committed by Houthi rebels, according to the Yemeni journalists' union and the Freedom Foundation.

"We strongly condemn the recent series of attacks committed by Houthi rebels," said Christophe Deloire, secretary-general of Reporters Without Borders. *"We also note that [since the beginning of the year](#), journalists have also been targeted for attack by security forces as well as unidentified armed groups. The government must take all means necessary to ensure the safety of media professionals throughout the country, and to punish those who violate their rights. Media organizations and news providers, for their part, must demonstrate their independence and professionalism in refraining from aggravating tensions and political conflicts."*

In the latest episode to date, on the morning of 31 July, **Youssef Hazb**, a journalist for [Mareh Press](#), and reporter **Youssef Qamhi** were [detained](#) by members of the armed wing of the Houthi insurgency, as they left the village of Al Warak, in the Iyal Surayh district. They had been [reporting](#) on the effects of fighting.

The two were held for four days in a sports stadium, accused of working for [Suhail TV](#), a station of the Sunni Islamist Al-Islah party, a major rival of the Houthi rebels. According to information gathered by RWB, the journalists endured threats before they were released as a result of pressure by media and their families. Their professional equipment, including memory cards, was seized.

The string of attacks on journalists began on 6 July, when armed Houthi insurgents [stormed](#) the house of journalist and activist **Yahya Al-Thalaya** in Amran city, one day before the province fell to the rebels.

Targeted because of his opposition to the rebels, Al-Thalaya had already fled with his family. The journalist told the Freedom Foundation that his coverage of events in the province had prompted the attack. Of special concern was an [interview](#) he had given on *Yemen TV* in which he described the prevailing humanitarian emergency.

On 11 July, **Hadi Al-Chami** and **Walid Al-Omri**, editor and staff member, respectively, of the *Khabar Agency* news service were [detained](#) by Houthis. *Khabar Agency* is affiliated with the General People's Congress, the former ruling party. According to the journalists' union, the two men were held for several hours before they were freed. Their phones and a camera were seized.

On 23 July, journalist **Abdel Wahab Al-Achabi** [escaped](#) a Houthi insurgency kidnapping attempt. The day before, his house had been searched and his family threatened. According to the journalists' union Al-Achabi had previously been [interrogated](#) by Houthis concerning other opposition journalists.

The Houthis

In a majority Sunni country, the Houthis are a Zaidi Shiite group . They take their name of their leader, Abd Al-Mali Al-Houthi, and are rooted in the northwest. Believing themselves [marginalized](#) politically, socially and religiously, the Houthi insurgents are aided by Iran.

The rebels aim to restore the religious authority of a Zaidi imam in Yemen and to reestablish the autonomous status that Houthis had enjoyed before 1962.

In June 2004, the "Saada War" began near the border with Saudi Arabia. The Yemeni army was backed by the forces of its Saudi neighbour. The Houthi uprising, a political movement and an organized insurrection, thanks to its armed wing – "Ansar Allah" (Partisans of Allah) – has gained control of a major swath of territory in the north.

The Houthis are in conflict with the powerful Al-Ahmar tribe (and the Hached tribal federation), and its Al-Islah party, for control of the Amran region. A cease-fire was signed in February, 2010.

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