

# XIX

## ARTICLE 19

For immediate release – 13 May 2009

### Yemen: Three Injured as Newspaper Offices Attacked

**This morning police surrounded and opened fire on the offices of independent daily Yemeni newspaper *Al Ayyam*'s, resulting in injuries to three staff.**

The shooting follows sustained police harassment since 4 May and the chief editor's refusal to be arrested by police forces. Authorities have grown uneasy about the newspaper's independent editorial line and its coverage of the events in the south of the country. *Al Ayyam* has not been able to go to print and its website has been blocked.

*"This might be my last phone call,"* says Bashraheel Bashraheel, *Al Ayyam* general director on the phone to ARTICLE 19. *"I appeal to all freedom advocates to support us and help in lifting the siege."*

According to Bashraheel, *Al Ayyam* employees receive death threats on a daily basis and one of its designers, Yasser Hitari, has been menaced with having his head cut off.

*"We have reached out to the authorities but without any response,"* Bashraheel says. *"On the contrary, judicial orders have been issued to arrest my father Hisham [chief editor] at any cost."*

Since 4 May, the Yemeni authorities have increased their stranglehold on the press. *Al Ayyam* has had lawsuits filed against it and the authorities have repeatedly intercepted distribution trucks and burned the newspapers. Bashraheel says that *Al Ayyam* has incurred losses amounting to US\$400,000 as a result of these measures.

The authorities are said to be unhappy with *Al Ayyam*'s publication of photos showing clashes between government forces and opposition groups in the south of Yemen.

*"Surrounding a newspaper and attacking it is an extraordinary step. Only in fully fledged armed conflicts do we witness such situations,"* says Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director. *"The attack must stop immediately. We demand that the Yemeni authorities lift the blockade on Al Ayyam and ensure the safety and security of all its staff."*

*Al Ayyam* was established in 1958 and is based in the southern city of Aden. It is very popular and considered by many Yemenis as an independent newspaper, adding particular voice to underprivileged people.

*Al Ayyam* is not the only newspaper suffering harassment and censorship. A comprehensive crackdown on the media by the Yemeni authorities has included six other newspapers over the past month, thereby possibly preventing potential coverage of the conflict in the south. There has been widespread unrest in the impoverished country for several years, especially in the south, where certain groups feel they are marginalised. Tension mounted in recent months, escalating at times into armed clashes between opposition protesters and government forces.

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

- For more information: please contact Sa'eda Kilani, sa'eda@article19.org; Tel:+962-79-9860004
- 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.