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<http://www.rsf.org/yemen-despite-saleh-departure-plan-05-01-2012,41632.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Yemen

Black December

Despite Saleh departure plan, supporters and security forces still targeting journalists

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December was a particularly black month for media freedom violations in Yemen although President Ali Abdallah Saleh agreed to a plan proposed by Gulf Cooperation Council in Riyadh on 23 November under which he is to stand down as president in February.

Reporters Without Borders firmly condemns the continuing violations and urges the international community to intercede. December was above all marked by violence by government troops and Saleh supporters against journalists covering the "March for Life," which set off from Taiz, a city 270 km south of the capital, on 20 December.

There were many attacks on the marchers on 24 and 25 December as they arrived at the Sanaa district of Dar Salm. Security forces opened fire on the crowd. At least 13 demonstrators were killed and 50 were wounded. Journalists were among the victims. Among other demands, the protesters had been calling for President Saleh to be prosecuted for his use of violence against earlier demonstrations.

On 24 December, **Ahmed Al-Mussibli**, a journalist with the opposition TV station *Suhail TV*, was beaten and arrested by security forces, and was held overnight. *BBC* correspondent **Abdallah Ghorab** narrowly avoided being arrested. *Suhail TV* cameraman **Kamal Al-Mahfadi** and reporter **Walid Ablan** sustained serious head injuries.

Ahmed Al-Jabar, a member of the Yemeni Journalists' Syndicate and reporter for the state-owned *Saba News Agency*, was hit in the face with a rifle butt by a Saleh supporter, sustaining an injuries below one eye. Soldiers also broke the windows of the car that members of the Journalists' Syndicate were using to cover the march.

Three journalists – **Samia Al-Aghbary**, **Arwa Abdu Othman** (a writer) and **Marwan Ismail**, who works for the *Imanate* news website – were accosted and arrested by members of the Republican Guard at a checkpoint on Sanaa's 50th Street while accompanying the March for Life on 24 December. Two activists who were with them, **Marwan Al-Wajihi** and **Nabil Soua'i**, were also arrested. The soldiers searched their car and took their mobile phones and three cameras. All five were released that evening.

Earlier this week, a group of gunmen tried to storm the Press Foundation in Taiz for the third time in three days on 2 January in defiance of clear instructions from the province's governor. The foundation's headquarters is located near the military police building and just a few metres from the provincial security directorate.

Nasser Taha Mustafa, a former head of the Journalists' Syndicate, was threatened in late December by Tarek Mohamed Abdallah Saleh, President Saleh's nephew and commander of his personal guard, over his articles in support of the revolutionary movement.

Two journalists with the 26 September newspaper, **Ali Ghaleb Al-Harazi** and **Yahiya Al-Sadmi**, were threatened for calling for the resignation of the newspaper's editor, **Ali Hassan Al-Chatr**, who has a reputation for high-handed treatment of his employees and has had some of them thrown in prison in the past. The journalists began a sit-in at the newspaper to demand Chatr's departure.

Firing in the air, gunmen in civilian dress attacked an *Al-Alam TV* crew at around 2:15 p.m. on 23 December in Al-Qaedi, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of the capital. They grabbed cameraman **Mohamed Hamran**'s camera, hit him, took his identity card and, threatening to shoot the tyres of their car, forced the journalists to return to the city centre.

Armed baltajiyas (pro-Saleh thugs) stormed the headquarters of the government newspaper in Sanaa on 20 December, threatening journalists at gunpoint and stopping the next day's issue from coming out. The raid was prompted by new information minister Ali Al-Umrani's decision to rename **Hassan Abdel Warath** as the editor of the newspaper, which is published by the "Revolution for the Press" foundation. Warath had resigned at the height of the anti-Saleh protests.

Gunmen burst into the office of the *Arab Information Agency* in Sanaa on the night of 13 December, pointing their firearms at its director, **Issam Al-Khaled**, and his employees. The office houses more than a dozen Arab and international TV stations and news agencies.

The prosecutor's office ordered the journalist **Omar Al-Amuqi**'s release on 8 December on the grounds that there had been no justification for his arrest two days before.

The journalist **Abdelhakim Thi'il** was freed at the end of December after being kidnapped in October and held incommunicado for two months in a national security prison operated by the intelligences services. His whereabouts were unknown until 12 December, when he was transferred to a regular prison centre and the head of the Journalists' Syndicate, **Marwan Damaj**, was able to visit him.

The precise reasons for his abduction and detention are still unknown. The authorities examined his computer and found photos and videos of baltajiyas and gunmen attacking and killing demonstrators in Sanaa's Change Square.
