

Table of Contents

- ***Yemen war: 'My children are starving to death'***
 - ***Woman accused of adultery & prostitution is stoned to death***
 - ***What a Houthi-controlled Yemen means for women***
 - ***Yemen: End child marriage***
 - ***Mass returns from Saudi risk instability in Yemen***
 - ***National dialogue in Yemen***
-

Yemen war: 'My children are starving to death'

As malnutrition spreads in sparsely populated areas of al-Tohaita, international aid has grown scarce, residents say.

By Nasser Al-Sakkaf

Aljazeera (12.10.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2dVAXer> - In a shantytown in a deserted area of Yemen's al-Tohaita district, six-year-old Ahmed Abdullah Ali and his 13 siblings often go to sleep hungry.

The effects of malnutrition have been the most dramatic on young Ahmed, whose small, frail body looks much younger than his age.

"I get 500 Yemeni rials [\$2] per day, and I have 14 children, so I can hardly provide them with bread, tea and goat's milk to drink," the boy's father, Abdullah Ali, told Al Jazeera.

"They are suffering from malnutrition. Always, they need food."

Many residents of this sparsely populated area, located in the western Hodeidah province, earn some income by breeding animals, but it is not enough to make a living.

About an hour's drive from the main road, many residents in this area of Tohaita are uneducated and illiterate, with large families to support. Although residents told Al Jazeera that they had received some support from aid groups in the past, including food and mattresses, such assistance has largely dried up amid Yemen's ongoing war.

"During the last two years, we did not receive any aid ... I do not need anything more than food for my children, who are starving to death," Ali said.

According to the World Food Programme, about 14 million people - more than half of Yemen's population - have become food insecure, while thousands more have died, and more than 1.5 million have been displaced by the conflict.

In Tohaita's shantytowns, most people cannot afford to buy even the basics, such as vegetables, fruit and milk, residents told Al Jazeera.

Throughout Yemen, at least 370,000 children were suffering from severe acute malnutrition as of August, said Mohammed Al-Asadi, a spokesman with the UN children's fund, UNICEF, in Yemen.

"We're talking about a 50 percent increase compared to the number we had earlier this year ... UNICEF has deployed four mobile teams, which detected over 150 cases of severely acute malnourished children in the past week," Asaadi told Al Jazeera. "Screening of children is ongoing as the detected children receive necessary treatment."

He confirmed that food insecurity due to poverty, unemployment and a lack of awareness of proper nutrition practices for children had been compounded by a lack of access to healthcare facilities.

Countrywide, 600 health centres and 113 nutritional treatment sites have been rendered non-functional due to the security situation or a lack of supplies or fuel, Assadi said.

Thousands of Yemeni children are believed to have died last year from preventable diseases, he added.

In the shantytowns of Tohaita, residents live in unsanitary conditions without indoor plumbing. It takes two hours for them to bring clean water, transporting it via donkeys. Basic services, such as hospitals and schools, are unavailable here.

Over the past year, some children in the area have contracted scabies, a skin disease marked by itching and red spots. Maha Mohammed Salem, aged eight, has been suffering from the disease for two months.

Her unemployed father relies on milk from his five goats and the charity of neighbours to feed Maha and her 11 siblings.

"I know this disease can transmit to my siblings, so I've been trying to remain far from them during the day," Maha told Al Jazeera. "But at night, we sleep in the same shanty, so the disease has spread to my one-year-old brother ... I heard there are hospitals in Hodeidah City that are treating children with scabies, but we do not have money to go there."

As she speaks, Maha applies baby powder to the rash on her small brother, Omar, to help alleviate his itching.

"It is difficult for me to take my children to Hodeidah city, so they have to face their destiny in this desert," Maha's father, Mohammed, told Al Jazeera.

"The solution is not in my hands."

According to Stephen O'Brien, the UN's emergency relief coordinator, the situation throughout Hodeidah has grown dire.

"The quantities of food, medicine and fuel entering the country are way below the needs and must be increased as a matter of urgency," O'Brien told a news conference after a three-day visit to Hodeida City last week.

O'Brien warned that while the UN has increased its humanitarian assistance to Yemen since April 2015 - reaching four million people in need - its programme is only 46 percent funded and has a deficit of \$880m.

Ahlam Abdul Rahim, a social activist in Hodeidah, said that international organisations must do more to reach people in some of the province's sparsely populated areas.

"The main victims are not in the hospitals," Abdul Rahim told Al Jazeera. "The main victims are still in their shanties in the desert."

Woman accused of adultery & prostitution is stoned to death

WUNRN (05.03.2016) - A woman has been stoned to death in south-east Yemen after being accused of adultery and prostitution by an Al-Qaeda Sharia court. The married woman was reportedly killed in a public execution in the city of Al Mukalla, which has been under the control of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) since April last year. Al-Qaeda militants 'placed the woman in a hole in the middle of the courtyard of a military building and stoned her to death in the presence of dozens of residents', according to an eyewitness report.

'This was the first time we have seen such a thing,' a witness said.

A copy of the purported verdict issued by a local Sharia court set up by the militants in December, said the married woman had 'confessed in front of the judges to committing adultery'.

What a Houthi-controlled Yemen means for women

Al-Monitor (18.03.2015) <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/yemen-women-activists-revolution-houthis-saleh.html> - Houthis published a [circular](#) in January 2015, pertaining to women in the city of Amran, banning them from going out following the Maghrib prayer, prohibiting them from bringing male bands or singers to their gatherings or parties, banning the use of cameras at women's gatherings and parties, including mobile phones with cameras. These new rules are being implemented in Amran, and the people there have been adhering to these rules to avoid punishment.

The circular stirred controversy in Yemeni society, especially among women who feel that the next phase will bring in many unpleasant surprises regarding hard-won gains they had achieved. Some women have concerns about Houthis since they are so dogmatic when it comes to women's rights.

Women in Yemen suffer from [discriminatory laws](#). The country has the largest [educational gap](#) between men and women: the [illiteracy rate](#) among men is 30%, and 67% among women. But the popular movement that [erupted](#) in February 2011 witnessed a heavy participation of women, drawing attention to women's issues, and following the revolution, the National Dialogue Conference in March 2013 brought about new [legislation](#), some of it related to the quota system and underage marriage. These were considered a victory for women.

[Houthis](#) are not the only political grouping in Yemen to target women. Yemeni women used to work on the land alongside men in rural areas. But when [Ali Abdullah Saleh](#) took power in 1978, the state policy started to tighten the noose around women's freedoms and rights, because of the political alliance between Saleh and the Muslim political movements to confront communists in the south. This reflected on the education curriculum and women started covering their faces, which hides their identities and decreases their role in the public sphere. Some political parties used women's rights as a card to show off their modernity, but they didn't adopt women's issues seriously, as their actions did not exceed mere media propaganda. On the other hand, religious political parties claimed that women's rights are something alien to our society and an attempt to Westernize society. But they showed a hypocrisy of sorts during elections, encouraging women to vote while not putting forth female candidates.

In 2011, Yemeni women took the streets to participate in the [revolution](#). Many of them were subjected to defamatory campaigns, which [culminated](#) in Saleh's April 2011 speech in which he banned gender-mixing in the demonstration arenas.

The president's statement caused a stir in a tribal conservative society, with a particular impact on the Islah Party, the Islamic party that was in control then. It was not long before the party started to set up checkpoints to ensure gender segregation, but failed to fully achieve its goals to impose segregation in the long term.

Although Islah seems to have been harsh about women's issues, Houthis are much worse. They are not obsessed with imposing gender segregation, but they obstruct female movement by forcing women to return to their homes before the sunset. All Yemeni political forces are similar in their targeting of women. The victims of Islah are now suffering the same fate at the hands of the Houthis, but with greater harassment and fear given the absence of any accountability for such acts.

In the past, there was a weak state but with a space for the freedom of media and civil society organizations supported by foreigners, pressuring the Yemeni government and political forces. Today, however, Houthis are free of any responsibility toward the international community, having free rein to harass journalists.

Back in April 2011, the 1st Armored Division — a military group close to the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist movements — beat [Arwa Abdo Othman](#), a woman who founded the House of Folklore institution, an organization working on the collection of Yemeni heritage pieces.

The attack came following Saleh's speech as the group used it as an excuse to impose gender segregation, under the pretext that women did not abide by the segregation orders.

Othman is being subjected to a new harassment campaign by the Houthis, as she believes that all religious groups tend to restrict women's freedoms in general. However, Houthis have been the worst so far in their campaign, as they sent her several [threats](#) because she participated in the commemoration of the Sept. 26 Revolution — which brought down imamate rule in 1962 — while dancing and singing in defiance with a group of young men.

The Houthi group had taken control of Sanaa a few days before the revolution's commemoration, on Sept. 21, 2014. Othman was then appointed minister of culture in the outgoing government in January, facing a relentless campaign by the Houthi media, [dubbing](#) the outgoing government "the government of dancing."

Similarly, Yemeni activist [Samia al-Aghbari](#) faced the same challenges, as Islah accused her in late December 2012 of being an infidel. Today, as the Houthis in power have been tarnishing her reputation, she is accused of being affiliated with the Islamic State (IS).

"With the 2011 revolution, we aspired for a better Yemen, and for Yemeni women in particular. However, when the 1st Armored Division joined in in March and started to violate women's rights, we sensed the danger. We knew that the future would be worse. Today, things are truly much worse, and we are threatened by a replication of the Taliban rule in Yemen," Aghbari told Al-Monitor.

"Houthis have more audacity than the Islah Party. While the latter sends its lower-ranking members to carry out all the slandering and threats, as Saleh's cronies used to do, today, prominent Houthi jurists and writers are brazenly performing the same acts," she added.

Student Hiba al-Zabahani, who shares the same opinion as Aghbari, believes that Houthis are more rigid than their predecessors, as they have threatened to strip her of her clothes if she continues to wear pants instead of the abaya, or cloak.

Just last Jan. 25, she took part in a student demonstration against Houthis in Sanaa University, where she refused to hand them her phone, with which she had captured attacks on students. She was beaten up along with her friend as a result.

"The most recent attack on Jan. 25 was the worst. We went out to protest the Houthi coup and the Houthis chased us with white arms [non-firearms]. We managed to escape them," Zabahani said. "Nothing is the same again."

However, a Yemeni activist and writer claims the Houthis will not succeed in cracking down on Yemeni women. She told Al-Monitor, on condition of anonymity, that the 2011 revolution was a turning point in her life.

Before 2011, she was a traditional housewife with six children coming from a socially and religiously conservative family. However, when her husband saw her great enthusiasm for the revolution, he allowed her to take part in it, which was her first contact with the public sphere. She was inspired by people such as [Tawakkol Karman](#), who was awarded the Nobel Peace prize and was one of the female leaders who participated in the 2011 revolution, among others.

After the revolution she decided to make her own way to the public domain and started writing, which raised the ire of her husband. He prohibited her or at least tried to convince her to write under a pseudonym. She refused and insisted on her right to reveal her true identity.

Radya al-Mutawakil, a human rights activist and the founder of [Mwatana organization](#), shares the same view. "The Houthis will fail to further crack down on women, because they will not last long," she told Al-Monitor.

Mutawakil, as well as all the other women Al-Monitor spoke with, agreed that the women's gains came as a result of their struggle and defiance of political forces, which greatly undermine and neglect women's issues, except as a show for the media. They believe that these political forces are not sincere or honest in their positions toward women, as they sometimes claim that they support them. Women hold senior positions in these parties' ranks such as Aghbari in the central committee of the Yemeni Socialist Party, and Karman in the Shura council of Islah; these are prominent positions that influence in the decision-making process in the parties. But this doesn't mean that the parties are struggling for women's rights, as it is not their priority. Thus, including women in leadership positions is for show. Women are not given incentives to participate in the political process other than just to vote in elections.

They believe that the achievements of the National Dialogue Conference, including the decisions on the women's [quota system](#) and the [minimum age of marriage](#), are merely for form's sake, as nothing has been achieved on the ground and political forces can easily circumvent these new rules.

Nevertheless, the fear barrier was destroyed in 2011, and women continue to try to safeguard their gains and prevent any attempt to force them back to stay at home after having been part of a revolution that brought them substantive change.

Yemen: End child marriage

Enact law establishing minimum age; Punish violators

Human Rights Watch (27.04.2014) / <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/04/27/yemen-end-child-marriage> – The Yemeni government should expedite passage of a draft Child Rights Law establishing 18 as Yemen's minimum marriage age. On April 27, 2014, Legal Affairs Minister Mohammad *Makhlafi* submitted the proposed law to Prime Minister Mohammad Basindawa, who should ensure a cabinet review and submit it to parliament for prompt passage.

"The draft minimum age law is a real beacon of hope for the thousands of Yemeni girls vulnerable to being married off while still children," said Nadim Houry, deputy Middle East and North Africa director. "The government should act quickly on this measure and develop enforcement mechanisms to prevent even more girls from becoming victims of early and forced marriage."

Some 52 percent of Yemeni girls are married – often to much older men – before age 18, and 14 percent before age 15, according to United Nations and Yemeni government data from 2006. Girls who marry young often drop out of school, are more likely to die in childbirth, and face a higher risk of physical and sexual abuse than women who marry at 18 or later. Girls who do not want to marry are often forced to do so by their families. Yemen is one of the few countries in the region now without any legal minimum age for marriage.

The draft law in article 46(c) requires the official filling out the marriage contract to verify the age of both the man and the woman. Article 242(a) provides criminal penalties of between two months and one year in prison and a fine of up to YER 400,000 (US\$1,860) for any authorized person who draws up a marriage contract knowing that at least one party is under 18. Any witnesses or signatories to the marriage contract, including the parents or other guardians, who know that at least one party is under 18 face a prison sentence of between one and three months and a fine of between YER 100,000 (US\$460) and 250,000 (US\$1,160).

The draft law also addresses other important children's rights issues. Articles 13(b) and 242(b) prohibit the practice of female genital mutilation, providing criminal penalties of between one and three years in prison and a fine of up to YER 1,000,000 (US\$4,644) to those who carry out the cutting. Articles 162 and 250(b) prohibit the use or recruitment of child soldiers, providing a fine of up to 300,000 (US\$1,393). Articles 150 to 157 and 247 prohibit child labor in line with international legal standards, providing fines for violators of up to YER 200,000 (US\$930).

The rules of Yemen's transitional government require the prime minister to call for a review of the draft law by the Council of Ministers. Once the council approves the draft, the prime minister submits the law for a parliamentary vote. If the parliament does not reach consensus, the rules of Yemen's transitional legal regime provide that the president could declare the law in effect himself.

The Yemeni government nearly passed similar legislation in 2009. Parliament was then scheduled to vote on a minimum age for marriage provision, but a small conservative bloc sought and obtained an additional review by the parliamentary Sharia Committee, which reviews draft laws to assess their compatibility with Sharia (Islamic law). After the committee objected to the draft law on religious grounds, neither parliament nor the president took further steps to adopt the law.

Should the Sharia Committee again oppose the draft law, the president can unilaterally

declare it in effect under the legal regime established in 2011 to facilitate a peaceful transition of power.

The draft law to establish a minimum marriage age is an effort to implement a recommendation made in January by Yemen's national dialogue conference, a 565-member forum created to establish the building blocks of a new constitution. The recommendation called for the government to set a minimum age for marriage at 18, in accordance with international standards, and for criminal sanctions for anyone who forces a child to marry.

Abdulwahab al-Anisi, the secretary general of *Islah*, the country's largest Islamist party, told Human Rights Watch after the close of the national dialogue that his party recognized the clear language of the recommendation and would support the passage of a law at the governmental and parliamentary stages. Some of the party's members strongly opposed the minimum age law in 2009.

Human Rights Watch has documented the severe and long-lasting harm to Yemeni girls forced by their families to marry, in some cases when they are as young as eight. Yemeni girls and women told Human Rights Watch that marrying early meant that they lost control over their lives, including the ability to decide whether and when to bear children, that it had cut short their education, and some said they had been subjected to marital rape and domestic abuse.

Yemen is party to a number of international conventions that explicitly prohibit or have been interpreted to prohibit child marriage and commit governments to take measures to eliminate the practice. In September 2013, the UN Human Rights Council called on Yemen to end early and forced marriages.

Many other countries in the Middle East and North Africa that recognize Sharia as a source of law have set the marriage age at 18 or higher, with some allowing exceptions in limited circumstances. These include:

Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates.

In addition to passing the law, and ensuring that police intervene to stop marriages that violate the law, Yemen's judicial authorities should pursue criminal cases against spouses, parents, and local authorities who continue the practice.

The government should develop a public campaign to raise awareness, particularly in rural communities, among religious leaders, medical professionals, and local officials about the harmful health and other consequences of child marriage for girls and women, Human Rights Watch said.

"The prime minister should provide strong leadership to get the minimum age for marriage and the child rights law on the books," Houry said. "There's no excuse for further delays in passing this desperately needed legislation."

Mass returns from Saudi risk instability in Yemen

IRIN (02.12.2013) - Around 200,000 Yemeni expatriate workers have returned from Saudi Arabia since June, according to estimates from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), amid a sharp escalation in deportations as Saudi authorities crack down on those breaking labour laws - developments that risk increasing poverty and destabilizing the transition in Yemen, say analysts.

The Yemeni government says it expects at least another 400,000 jobless returnees in coming months.

"[The returnees] complain of different kinds of violations, not necessarily from the authorities but from their sponsors (Kafeel') when they refuse to pay them any compensation for the work that they have done in their companies," said Hooria Mashhour, Yemen's Minister of Human Rights. "Other kinds of violations [take place] during the process of deportation, when they become subject [to] physical or psychological kinds of violations."

The returns have placed a huge burden on Yemen's fragile political transition, conjuring up memories of the 1990 expulsion of more than 800,000 Yemenis from Saudi Arabia, which contributed to the unravelling of a 1990 unification pact between the former North and South Yemeni states and led to the 1994 civil war.

"Without giving them the opportunities to live a decent life we fear that they might be turned into element of instability," said Mashhour. "For the short term indeed they are in bad need of immediate assistance like food and medical treatment, but for the long term we have to provide. [many] more job opportunities to cover their family's needs and. [theirs] as well."

Working in neighbouring Saudi Arabia has been a way for Yemenis to escape their country's chronic unemployment; more than half of Yemenis aged 18 to 24 are unemployed.

"I went to Saudi two years ago to make a living for me and my family. The situation was good there, and there was no work here," said Radhwan, 25, who has just been deported at the end of the grace period, after two years in Saudi Arabia. "On the first day, Jeddah's biggest mall on Palestine Street was empty. Saudis don't work in the supermarkets, factories and shops. So what now?"

According to figures from IOM, which are helping to provide emergency assistance to returnees at the Al-Tuwal crossing point, 93 percent of returnees are male, with 98 percent saying they returned because they lacked proper documents.

"Yemenis who have been in Saudi Arabia since their grandfathers migrated are being kicked out with this new law. They have nothing in Yemen; they don't know anything about Yemen," said Radhwan.

Crackdown

In late March 2013, the police initiated a brief crackdown on foreign workers as part of a government policy to enforce labour laws and create more jobs for millions of unemployed Saudi workers.

Raids and checkpoints were suspended in April to give foreigners a chance to get their papers in order, but the number of expatriates trying to obtain documents from their embassies overwhelmed capacity, and the government again extended the grace period to 4 November after which the crackdown began.

Under Saudi Arabia's work sponsorship scheme, the original employers of expatriate workers need to give permission for a change of employment, as well as permission to leave. Many sponsors also take the migrant workers' passports on arrival. Until now, the state has tolerated workers changing employers without the necessary paperwork because of the importance of foreign workers to the Saudi economy.

Thousands of families back home depend on Yemenis working abroad for life-sustaining remittance payments. According to surveys by IOM, three-quarters of those returning formerly sent back money to Yemen.

"The fact that the families will not receive these remittances anymore will have a major impact on them and the economy of their region," said IOM's Teresa Zakaria in a statement.

"We are looking, here, at approximately US\$5 million lost in remittances for the months of October and November alone. Most of them are returning to areas with high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition. The massive loss of income will inevitably exacerbate this situation," she said.

Abuse

Radhwan tried to smuggle himself back to Yemen to avoid being put in the deportees' database - an attempt to preserve his chances of legally returning later - but he was caught and arrested.

"Saudi forces caught me at the border fence near al-Tuwal. They took me to jail and put me in a small cell overcrowded with Yemenis. On arrival, a guard followed me into the bathroom and beat me with a wire cable," he said.

There are an estimated nine million migrant workers in Saudi Arabia, including large numbers of Bangladeshis, Yemenis and Ethiopians. Human rights groups have frequently reported cases of abuse and exploitation, but because of the difference in economic opportunities between one of the poorest countries on the Arabian Peninsula, and one of the richest, many Yemenis keep going north in search of work.

Around 35 percent of returnees interviewed by IOM reported having been physically abused and having had their possessions confiscated in Saudi Arabia.

Abdul Salam, 27, from Yemen's Rhayma province, has been smuggled into Saudi Arabia on four occasions and deported each time. "This time we were bussed back to [al-Tuwal,] Yemen. In the past they would fly us home."

In Saudi Arabia, he worked for Yemeni businessmen from his village, selling phones, perfumes and sweets. "They [Yemeni owners] only hire smuggled workers during holiday seasons, like Hajj, when law enforcement is more relaxed. During the rest of the year, the legitimate business owners would get kicked out of the country if [they] were caught employing undocumented workers like me."

When employed, Abdul Salam said he would send home about half of his monthly salary of 1,500 Saudi riyals (\$400) to his family in Yemen. "Even then, with his contribution, there wasn't enough money for the family," said his younger brother, Mohammed, who lives in Sana'a. "Now we have even less. We can't buy enough food for daily meals. We have no washing machine, no fridge. We can only afford the most basic things."

With the enforcement of labour laws, Abdul Salam said it has become tougher to find smugglers who could be trusted to lead home the droves of Yemenis who have sought to avoid being identified in the formal deportation process.

Abdul Salam had been fingerprinted three times in prior deportations, but even after being beaten and robbed last year by the gang he paid to get him back into Saudi Arabia, he said he decided to take his chances again on a smuggler for his most recent cross-border trip back to Yemen, in the hope of avoiding another stint in the Saudi prison

system.

"I found a smuggler who took me half way, then disappeared," he said. "We started walking and found a farm, where we were given water and food. Before we finished eating, the police arrested us. They forced all 15 of us into a military jeep and drove back 400km to the jail, where we were crammed into a cell already completely full of people."

Vulnerable

Human Rights Watch (HRW) says Saudi Arabia has the right to seek compliance with its labour laws, but should look at how the current system leaves workers vulnerable to abuse.

"You have to understand why so many workers in Saudi have irregular status, why so many are working for companies and individuals [who] are not their official sponsors," Adam Coogle, Middle East researcher at HRW, told IRIN.

"Employers have such inordinate power [over] their employees. Where workers are subjected to problems such as non-payment of salaries, poor sanitation, sexual and physical abuse, there is little the workers can do because they need their initial employer's approval to change job. The worker system means they have to face abuse or work under the table illegally," he said.

Relations between Yemen and its richer northern neighbour have often been tense, exemplified by perennial disputes over the location and policing of their shared 1,458km border. Saudi Arabia supported the now-defunct regime of Yemen's ex-President Saleh in a civil conflict against Shi'ite Houthi rebels, a mutual enemy straddling the Yemeni-Saudi frontier.

With little chance of employment in Yemen, both Abdul Salam and Radhwan are planning to be smuggled over the border soon to look for work - but this time they intend to avoid Saudi Arabia and travel east into Oman.

National dialogue in Yemen

Sada (01.11.2012) - Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, the transitional president of Yemen, is doing everything he can to bring the different groups in his country to a national dialogue planned for the middle of November 2012. The discussions are expected to last for six months and to address a range of issues related to the transition. If successful, the dialogue is supposed to come out with a vision for a "civil state"—a goal that almost all the included groups have talked about in one way or another—and to begin with the presidential elections in February 2014, and to include the drafting of a new constitution for the country. But if the dialogue fails, civil war looms ominously as a likely outcome. There are a number of challenges that might lead to the dialogue's failure.

Among those is the issue of southern secessionists, or the Peaceful Southern Movement (*al-Hirak al-Salmiyy al-Janubi*) —or alternatively, the Southern Separatist Movement. Hirak, as it is known locally, has no unified leadership, and a number of different visions each claim to speak for the whole movement. All, however, are concerned with three things: correcting the failures of Yemeni unification, the application of federalism, and the degree of southern autonomy or independence. One group, for example, is inspired and supported by the former president of South Yemen, Ali Salem Al Baidh (in exile since his defeat in the 1994 civil war). They believe that the southern part of Yemen is

“occupied” by the north, and struggle for an independent south. This group wants the dialogue to lead the restoration of a southern state. A different former president of South Yemen Ali Nasser Mohammed (also in exile) leads another group; they talk about a federal system in which Yemen might be divided into three or five regional states.

The majority of southerners have long complained of being politically and socially marginalized after the 1994 civil war—which erupted less than four years after a north-south union was proclaimed. “The issue of the south is an issue of land and wealth that was looted,” said Mohammed Haidara Masdous, a HIRAK leader. “It is an issue of identity and history that was obliterated for the favor of the north.” Nearly all parties and politicians in Yemen note that HIRAK’s participation is the key to the dialogue, which is difficult due to the group’s amorphous nature. If HIRAK is convinced of unity, then most of the other disgruntled groups will follow—namely, the Shia Houthis in the north, who present similar challenge. Dr. Abdul Kareem Al Eryani, the deputy chairman of the People’s General Congress (to which some 50 percent of the national unity government belongs, and is headed by former president Ali Abdullah Saleh) and head of the technical committee for preparing for the dialogue, said: “It’s impossible to have a successful dialogue without the participation of HIRAK.”

A number of prominent Islamists feel likewise: Mohammed Qahtan, a leading member of Yemen’s leading Islamist party, Al-Tajamm'u Al-Yamani Lil-Islah (known informally as “Islah”) said, “To bring the dialogue to success, the problems of the south should be solved first.” Islah has dominated the political coalition of opposition groups that led protests against Saleh and the PGC last year. The coalition, known as Joint Meeting Parties (JMPs), includes Islah, the Yemen Socialist Party (which ruled the south before unification in 1990), Nasserites) and Baathists, as well as two smaller Islamist—Zaydi—parties. That Zaydi groups—a moderate Shia sect found almost exclusively in the north—are in coalition to support the Southern cause is a significant sign of non-partisanship.

Others feel differently. Professor Adel Al Shugaa, a history professor at Sanaa University, believes that Islamist groups would obstruct any dialogue that leads to an agreement about establishing a civil state, although the largest Islamist party Islah raises the slogans of a civil state. The Islamist groups consider the civil state to be something against Islam,” said Mr Al Shugaa. “Islamists refuse the notion that Muslims be equal to non-Muslims, and refuse equality between men and women.”

There are other complications. Islah insists on having HIRAK in the dialogue, but it has its own interests in the mix competing under the banner of southern autonomy—one of HIRAK’s main leaders, Abdullah Al Nakhebi, recently appointed this past September to the coordinating committee of the national dialogue, is viewed as having strong ties to Islah. Islah now comprises the largest opposition party in Yemen, and has tremendous influence on President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi through its tribal, religious, and military, leaders. These traditional forces still dominate the larger political and social scene in Yemen exactly as they did under Saleh—indeed, Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi hails from the same party—and stand to lose a great deal if the dialogue comes out with a solid vision for law and order. To this end, there are some who believe the new regime to be allying itself with Islah against HIRAK and the Houthis—despite calling them to participate in the national dialogue—to as to preserve a unified Yemen and their place in it. Islamists want to keep the unity but they do not want secularism and socialism of the south. The “real” HIRAK knows this very well.

“Bringing all groups to the dialogue will not necessarily lead to success,” said Sami Ghalib, a political analyst. “The problem is that the gaps between the new regime and HIRAK and the Houthis are getting wider and wider.” That both groups allegedly receive funding from Iran doesn’t help matters. Sporadic clashes have erupted between Islamist

supporters of Islah and the Houthis in Saada, Hajja, and Al Jawof; Islah has likewise clashed with Hiram in the southern city of Aden.

Activist Afra Al Hariri, who herself hails from the south—doesn't believe that the problems of the south have changed, even after a southern president came to power: "Insecurity, exclusion, marginalization, absence of equal citizenship, and the same faces who were ruling us are still there being repeated," Al Hariri says. Success for the dialogue, she points out, lies in two contingents—and the onus is on the north: "The tribal speeches against the south should stop, and fatwas [religious decrees] should stop."

Tribal and religious anti-southern rhetoric dates back to the civil war and continues to raise southern ire. Incidents date back to 1994, when the then-Minister of Justice and Islah-affiliated northern religious leader Abd al-Wahhab al-Daylami (and later, the influential cleric Sheikh Abdul Majeed al-Zindani) issued fatwas declaring southern socialists of being kafirs (infidels), and called for holy war against them. More recently, northern tribal leader Sadeq Al Ahmar, declared earlier this month that he would lead a war against southerners who would not participate in the dialogue. Both statements were widely condemned by northerners and southerners alike.

Additionally, the activities of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) continuously attempt to thwart any political success also present a security challenges. Despite this, however, some insist that al-Qaeda participate as long as the Houthis and Hiram—both of which are armed entities—are going to participate.

Opponents to Hiram's participation accuse southerners of jockeying for power. "It is not a matter of power. If it were a matter of power, the current president is from the south, said Mohammed Haidara Masdous, a Hiram leader. "The prime minister is from the south, and the defense minister is from the south. But it is not an issue of power." But the situation on the ground is such that Yemenis cannot establish a national rule of law without the help of players outside the looming north-south tensions. To this end, The UN envoy to Yemen Jamal Bin Omar has even opened a permanent office in Sanaa to monitor closely the implementation of the transitional deal and the two resolutions of the UN Security Council on Yemen crisis. An important factor that will affect the success or failure of the national dialogue is international and regional support. President Hadi and the unity government cannot do anything without external players, whose support is vital. At present, though, such backing seems enough to ensure that the dialogue will be held—and all groups represented, even despite the difficulties. But the problems of north-south tensions will likely remain unresolved after November, and Yemen's civil war anxieties will likely remain until the rhetoric—and the suspicions behind them—change entirely.
