

briefing

minority
rights
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international

‘Even war discriminates’: Yemen’s minorities, exiled at home

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A GIRL FROM YEMEN'S MARGINALIZED CLASS, THE MUHAMASHEEN, STANDS IN THE REMAINS OF HER HOME AFTER IT WAS HIT BY AN AIRSTRIKE IN SAN'A, YEMEN ON JULY 19, 2015. © ALEX KAY POTTER

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Executive summary

Since the onset of the Saudi-led military campaign in March 2015, the conflict in Yemen has resulted in more than 5,700 documented deaths and 27,000 people injured as of November 2015.¹ Civilians are trapped in a conflict surrounding them by land and air, with aerial strikes affecting all governorates, cities entirely besieged and humanitarian assistance restricted. While the death toll is based on estimates and does not represent the actual number of casualties in Yemen today, figures will continue to rise as the conflict continues.

In the context of rising religious extremism, the threat of targeted violence between Sunni and Zaidi Shi'a Muslims has also increased. The discourse of various armed groups and parties to the conflict, including the Saudi-led coalition, has only deepened the fault lines of a conflict that, though rooted in economic, social and political grievances, risks becoming defined in sectarian terms – a development with troubling implications for Yemeni society, including its forgotten minorities. Yemen's Muslim and non-Muslim minorities have been targeted by acts of violence which, although sporadic so far, could put their future survival in doubt.

Insecurity, lack of effective governance and the impact of the coalition's blockade on the import of food,

medicine, fuel and humanitarian assistance for months since the conflict started have all contributed to the onset of a 'Level 3 Emergency' in Yemen, a classification reserved by the UN for the most severe humanitarian crises and the largest in scale. Despite the urgency of the situation, few humanitarian agencies have actually returned or expanded their operations adequately to meet people's needs. Millions of civilians are displaced, without adequate food supplies and in urgent need of assistance, with minorities such as the Muhamasheen – a group that suffers from caste-based discrimination – left particularly vulnerable. The Muhamasheen lack proper documentation, equal access to available resources, and are often made even more vulnerable by being displaced to the edges of cities or frontlines.

The impact of war in Yemen has been compounded by silence in the media and among the international community, and inaction at the level of regional and international bodies such as the UN Security Council and even the UN Human Rights Council. Unless an immediate cessation of hostilities takes place, civilians will continue to bear the heaviest burden in the conflict. Without effective protection, some of Yemen's minorities may well struggle for their survival.

Yemen



Methodology

This briefing provides background information on Yemen and focuses mainly on the situation of some of the most marginalized minorities in the present conflict. Further research in Yemen's conflict zones is necessary, with attention given to other minorities as well, as the focus of this briefing was partly based on the accessibility of information. The briefing is divided into two main parts, one focusing on religious minorities in Yemen, and the second focusing on the situation of the Muhamasheen.

It draws on extensive field and desk research from various sources, including public documentation, such as human rights updates and humanitarian situation reports, as well as various articles and pieces focusing specifically on minorities. The report is also based on focus groups

organized in Yemen and on 20 primary interviews, remotely and in person, with activists and members of minorities inside and outside Yemen, as well as human rights representatives, aid workers and analysts. Field research and visits were made possible through partners on the ground. While much of the research was conducted before or in the early months of the conflict, most of the interviews and more recent information was collected between July and December 2015. Some names and identifying characteristics of interviewees have been changed for security reasons.

The author of the report would like to particularly thank and pay tribute to all the Yemenis who contributed to this briefing, for their courage and relentless struggle in the face of the international silence on Yemen.

Background to the conflict

In the caverns of its death my country neither dies nor recovers

It moves from one overwhelming night to a darker night

My country grieves in its own boundaries and in other people's land

And even on its own soil suffers the alienation of exile.

'From exile to exile', Abdallah Al-Baradouni

Yemen, the land once named Arabia Felix,² is a country many only hear of in relation to tribal kidnappings, small arms proliferation, terrorism (or fears thereof) and drones. While the complexities and diversity of Yemen and its population rarely make it to the headlines, lately it seems that even its wars struggle to do so.

For more than a year, Yemen has been at war, a war that has placed its population under embargo and caused a dramatic humanitarian crisis. Operation 'Decisive Storm', a military campaign launched in March 2015 by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) with a coalition of international partners³ has had a catastrophic impact on Yemen's civilian population. It has added to the severity of the country's internal conflict and exacerbated its political and social divisions. The coalition's campaign, condoned by the UN Security Council and the international community, followed the request for assistance by President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Al Hadi and aimed to restore his control over the country. The coalition pledged to push back an armed opposition group called Ansar Allah, commonly known as the Houthis, who had joined together with forces loyal to former President Ali Abdallah Saleh and taken over the capital, Sana'a, in September 2014. In January 2015, Hadi resigned from his post, before being placed under house arrest. In February 2015 he fled south to Aden in February 2015 where he gave a speech, which he signed as 'President

of the Republic of Yemen',⁴ before again fleeing the country to Riyadh with the beginning of the coalition's campaign.

In support of its military campaign, the Saudi-led coalition has imposed an air and sea blockade on the country since March 2015. The blockade, which was announced as a measure to stop weapons from entering the country, has had a very serious effect on all of Yemen's imports. The country, which imports 90 per cent of its food supply, was left without food, medicine or fuel, which in turn aggravated the water scarcity it already suffers from. As of December 2015, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that 21.2 million Yemenis, around 82 per cent of the country's population, were in need of humanitarian assistance: of these 14.4 million were food insecure and more than 2.5 million had been internally displaced.⁵ Despite indications, as of December 2015, that the blockade had partly eased, it has still not been fully lifted and much of the harm it has caused cannot be easily undone.

In addition to the coalition's airstrikes and blockade, ground fighting has been tearing Yemen's cities apart and limiting access to already scarce humanitarian aid. Armed confrontations between various factions have led in some areas to the creation of enclaves where the civilian population has limited movement and where humanitarian access is almost non-existent. This is the case in the city centre of Taiz, for instance, one of Yemen's main cities and once its cultural capital. Taiz has been devastated by a humanitarian crisis partly due to fighting and restrictions imposed by parties to the conflict. A siege imposed by Houthi forces has prevented most humanitarian assistance from reaching the city's civilian population for months. Battles to control the city, compounded by aerial strikes, have razed much of it to the ground.

The weight of oblivion: how silence has exacerbated Yemen's current conflict

'It feels as if the world turned the lights off and left our house. Alone we stand in this darkness.... Tell them we will light all our candles, for hope.'

Yemeni doctor, Sana'a, September 2015

While UN agencies are mostly operating through local implementing partners in Yemen and with very reduced numbers of staff, most humanitarian organizations evacuated their non-essential staff in early 2015 and did not return, or returned with limited operations and movement, due to security concerns. Fuel scarcity, insecurity, restrictions by various armed groups and also the self-imposed restrictions of many humanitarian organizations have had a direct impact on their ability to access those most in need of assistance. The civilian population, while requiring high levels of humanitarian assistance, remains largely unreached and is trapped between unfriendly borders by land, and hostile seas. Of the estimated 168,129 people who have left Yemen since April 2015,⁶ most are Somalis and other nationalities, including Ethiopians.

The lack of coverage of the conflict in international media is only amplified by the inaction of various UN bodies and major powers. In September 2015, a UN

Human Rights Council draft resolution, initiated by the Netherlands and calling for a UN fact-finding mission to investigate and document allegations of human rights violations and international humanitarian law in Yemen, was quickly opposed by the Saudi-led coalition and its Arab partners.⁷ The Saudi-led group submitted a separate resolution, and the Dutch had to withdraw their resolution for lack of support from Yemen itself and from other members of the Human Rights Council, including the US, the UK and France. As a result, an important opportunity to launch urgent independent investigations into the current human rights situation in Yemen was missed.

The resolution that was adopted was much weaker and instead asked the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to provide 'technical assistance' to the government of Yemen, 'to enable Yemen to fulfil its human rights obligations', and to assist a national commission of inquiry. The resolution was in effect drafted and led by a party to the conflict. It constituted a significant step backwards compared with the initial Dutch draft resolution, as it disregarded the need to dispatch a fact-finding mission to independently investigate and publicly report on violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in Yemen.

Standing on the ruins of one's life: allegations of human rights and international humanitarian law violations in Yemen.

*A family of seven, including a 2-year-old grandson, was displaced from the centre of Taiz in April 2015. After months of being on the move and looking for a permanent place to stay, they decided to return to their home. The father, who was meant to pack up and hand in the keys of the house where they had been staying, was the last to leave. He arrived home to find his house in ruins and his entire family buried under the rubble. According to one Yemeni aid worker, 'He since returns there every day and calls their names individually. He was very attached to his grandson, that is the name he calls the most.'*⁸

Accounts similar to the one above (MRG) are common in Yemen today. While the circumstances of this particular airstrike are unknown, many have hit schools, residential neighbourhoods, including in the old city of Sana'a, the houses of political opponents and their families, and sites that are protected under international humanitarian law, such as hospitals. In May 2015, the entire city of Saada was designated a military target by a coalition spokesperson, a

designation which goes against the principle of distinction between civilian and military targets under international humanitarian law.

While airstrikes are the greatest cause of fatalities, the use of explosive weapons and various forms of artillery, sniper bullets, cluster munitions and mines have been reported in civilian areas. Ninety-three per cent of casualties from air-launched explosive weapons alone on populated areas between January and July 2015 were civilians.⁹ Allegations of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict continue to emerge;¹⁰ these include indiscriminate aerial attacks, bombing and looting of medical facilities, diversion of aid and restrictions by armed groups on access to humanitarian aid, use and recruitment of children, enforced disappearances, and targeted killings or extra-judicial executions. No credible or independent investigations into allegations of international humanitarian law or human rights violations committed by either party to the conflict have so far been conducted.

The situation of Yemen's religious minorities

Yemen is often portrayed as religiously homogenous country, as 99 per cent of its general population are Muslim. Muslims in Yemen are mainly divided into Shafi'i Sunnis (the majority of Sunnis in Yemen, estimated to be around 65 per cent of the population), with Shi'a making up the remaining 35 per cent.¹¹

Though the small proportion of non-Muslims in Yemen account for less than 1 per cent of the general population, there are a number of religious minorities in Yemen, including Bahá'í, Christians, Hindus and Jews. Yemen's minorities also include a number of Muslim minorities. Zaidi Shi'a are the largest Muslim minority, and the Ismailis, also known as the Seveners, constitute the second largest Shi'a minority in Yemen. Sufism is also practised in various parts of the country, including Aden. Like non-Muslim minorities, a number of Muslim minorities have also historically experienced discrimination in Yemen.

The rise of religious extremism

While a black-and-white picture of intolerance and extremism is routinely presented in the headlines on Yemen, the country's complexities partly reveal themselves in relation to its minorities and their survival as part of the social fabric in various regions. Judaism has since ancient times been an integral part of Yemeni society. Minorities have existed in Yemen, even if in small numbers, for centuries. While targeted incidents of violence against non-Muslims have occurred over the past few decades, there has been a considerable rise in violence and extremism over the past decade or so.

A number of Yemenis interviewed for this briefing portrayed the rise in religious extremism as 'un-Yemeni', an imported phenomenon that they regarded as alien to Yemeni society. Some thought it was the product of Wahhabi influence, and political Islam. Poverty and socio-economic marginalization have certainly played a role in the ability of radical movements to mobilize and recruit, especially among youth. Regardless of the root causes, the realities today for minorities have nevertheless been shaped by decades of change, including the rise of extremist groups. These mainly include Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the recent Islamic State (IS) in Yemen, denounced by AQAP itself as 'barbaric'¹² and regarded by many of those interviewed for this briefing as more extreme than AQAP, with no tribal grassroots or connections. Both groups have been able to exploit the power voids created in recent months. In mid April 2015, AQAP benefited from the fighting in other governorates and expanded its control in Hadramout, taking over the

port of Al Mukalla. AQAP has reportedly been attempting to gain the trust of the local population through service provision among other methods.¹³

Respondents also indicated that the IS affiliate in Yemen has been mushrooming in a number of areas in recent months, particularly in the south, enabled by the spread of the conflict. Respondents stated that IS had benefited from the coalition's distribution of weapons and equipment to various forces fighting against the Houthis, especially in Aden. In Sana'a, it has claimed responsibility for several explosions and attacks in the last year, including on mosques attended by Houthi followers inside the capital.¹⁴ Simultaneous attacks on mosques in Sana'a in March 2015, which left 137 dead, were reportedly followed by a message posted by IS supporters on Twitter, referring to the Houthis as 'polytheists' and warning of a 'flood' to come.¹⁵ Calls for fighters and Sunni tribes to join the fight against the 'Shi'a Houthis' have been common among both groups.

In the interviews for this briefing, many respondents cited the escalation of sectarian tensions as a major concern, with lasting implications for Yemeni society. References in the media and by analysts on the war between 'Sunni Saudi Arabia' and the 'Iran-backed Shi'a rebels' – a flawed oversimplification of the dynamics of the current conflict – serve only to deepen further these dividing lines. The use of hate speech and incitement to sectarian violence has been widely reported during the conflict.¹⁶

A number of residents displaced from Saada, primarily Zaidi Shi'a, also highlighted concerns over potential sectarian friction between internally displaced persons and host communities. In an interview, two residents of the old city of Sana'a described how the recent attacks and insecurity had created a distinction between Zaidis and Sunnis in the city:

'We have never distinguished between a Zaidi mosque and a Sunni mosque. We all pray in one mosque, have always done. But now we are afraid to go where the Zaidis pray. So we now pray in our gardens, hoping God will accept our prayers.'

Sunni respondents, Sana'a, September 2015

Who are Yemen's Zaidis?

The Zaidis, known as Fivers, represent one of the branches of Shi'a Islam. Zaidism is distinct from Twelver Shi'ia belief,¹⁷ which is practised in Iran and elsewhere, and is often said to bear more similarities to Sunni than to Shi'a Islam. The distinctions between Zaidism and Twelver Shi'a

belief mean that Zaidis do not fall under the religious patronage of Iran, nor do they have the same cultural and spiritual links as some Shi'a communities elsewhere, in Lebanon for example. While all Shi'a confine the imamate to the lineage of Ali, different sects within Shi'a Islam differ on the genealogy, as to where to trace that lineage and where to terminate it. The Zaidis do so with Zaid bin Zain Al-Abideen. For Zaidis, a legitimate ruler would ideally be a descendant of Prophet Muhammad through Fatimah, his daughter,¹⁸ but also – and alternatively if kinship is not possible – be someone with supreme knowledge, wisdom and justice, which they perceive to be essential qualities of a

good Imam. In Zaidism, the image of the Imam is loaded with religious but also social symbolism. The Zaidi imamate in Yemen ended with the 1962 republican revolution, after almost one thousand years. The end of the imamate was followed by the marginalization of northern areas, such as the Saada governorate, which are predominantly Zaidi.

While Zaidis make up the majority of Houthi followers, it is not the case that all Zaidis are Houthis. Zaidism, which was once associated with the imamate, is today associated with the Houthis. This association has also partly exacerbated the sectarian divides that are currently emerging.

The Saada war and the rise of the Houthis

'Death to America, Death to Israel, Damnation to the Jews' is part of the slogan for which the Houthis have become well known, one that many of their members claim is targeted at the states and policies of Israel and the US, rather than Jewish or American civilians.

The Houthis were originally followers of the late Hussein Al Houthi, a former member of parliament, who led them at the beginning of what became known as the Saada war, until he was killed in September 2004. The war started as a local insurgency in Saada governorate, an underdeveloped and marginalized area near the border with Saudi Arabia, during the rule of former President Ali Abdallah Saleh. Saleh labelled the Houthis a terrorist group, an accusation many refuted, as they had not conducted any attacks against civilians. He also accused them of attempting to overthrow the government and to bring back the rule of the imamate to Yemen. The Houthis claimed that their goal was to end the marginalization of their people and to have a fair ruler.¹⁹ The Houthis blamed



POSTERS PAYING TRIBUTE TO KILLED HOUTHI FIGHTERS ADORNING SHOPS AND WALLS IN SANA'A WITH THE HOUTHI SLOGAN OF 'GOD IS GREAT, DEATH TO AMERICA, DEATH TO ISRAEL, DAMNATION TO THE JEWS, VICTORY TO ISLAM' © RANIA EL RAJJI

Saleh for his ties with the US and Saudi Arabia, which they perceived to be expanding Salafism into Yemen, including Saada.

Yemen's Ismailis: caught in the crossfire

Ismailis form another branch of Shi'a Islam that is distinct from both Twelver and Zaidi faith. While Ismailis divide into various branches and subgroups, in Yemen, they mainly belong to the *Sulaymaniya* and *Dawoodiya* (commonly known as Bohra) groups. Ismailis in Yemen have had a history of persecution dating back to the imamate, which at times prompted their exile within Yemen, mainly to Haraz, and to other parts of the world, including India where most Bohras are found today.²⁰ As a result of the importance they place on their shrines, Ismailis have constantly been accused of polytheism. The secretive nature of their faith is largely a result of the denigration they suffered following the fall of the Fatimid dynasty,²¹ and continue to suffer to this day due to prejudices about their belief and practices. They have also reportedly been marginalized,²² and were excluded from

political representation in Yemen, including at the level of the National Dialogue Conference.

In July 2015, IS claimed an attack on a Dawoodi Ismaili mosque in Sana'a, reportedly accusing Dawoodi Ismailis of supporting the Houthis.²³ In a statement that followed the explosion, IS stated that the attack was part of a 'wave of military security operations in revenge for Muslims against the Houthi *rafida*' (meaning 'rejectors'), and that the explosion targeted a 'temple belonging to the Ismaili Bohra, who support the polytheist Houthis'.²⁴ Attacks against Dawoodi Ismailis in Aden have also been reported, including threats and accusations made against them of supporting the Houthis, which prompted some of the city's Dawoodi Ismailis to leave the country for Djibouti.²⁵ With the beginning of the war, the Indian government also evacuated thousands of Indians caught in Yemen, including at least 140 Dawoodi Ismailis who were in Aden on a pilgrimage, some of whom had family ties in Yemen.²⁶ Activists informed MRG that incidents of

kidnapping of Ismailis have been on the rise since the conflict started, some in Sana'a and others in Aden. While in a few cases the kidnappers had reportedly requested a ransom, the reasons for some of the kidnappings were unknown.²⁷

While there are spiritual differences between various Shi'a sects, the case of the Ismailis, like that of the Zaidis, points towards a deepening of the Shi'a–Sunni divide in Yemen. The individual grievances and violations suffered by Ismaili Yemenis, like all other minorities in Yemen, are more and more likely to fall through the cracks in a polarized war. The use of hate speech and slogans targeting specific religious groups, including by prominent sheikhs during Friday prayers, is common in Yemen and the region. This has contributed directly to an increase in violence, especially affecting religious minorities.²⁸

The last Yemeni Jews

'I am Temani Y. Z.²⁹ the Yemeni, the Jew, the son of Sana'a ...'

Yemeni Jewish man, Sana'a, December 2015

Following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the Middle East's Jewish communities withered as people eventually left their respective countries, mainly to go to Israel, but also to North and South America, Australia and Europe. While declared *personae non grata* in a number of Arab countries, in some they remained and tried to fight for their existence. This nevertheless became an increasing struggle. Within ten years, the Jewish population of the Arab world had halved. Those who remained were subject to travel bans in places, and faced the rise of fundamentalism and anti-Jewish sentiment, especially with the repercussions of the various wars between Israel and Arab countries, including the 1967 war.

The Yemeni Jews have had a history of legal and social persecution in Yemen, causing a steady trickle of Jews out of Yemen, often on foot, to Palestine over the centuries. Though treated as social pariahs for much of the nineteenth century, their situation temporarily improved after the Turks recaptured Yemen and abrogated humiliating decrees such as the 'crown decree'³⁰ in 1872. In 1921 Imam Yahya reinstated the 'orphans decree', which remained in place until the 1950s. The decree ordered that every *dhimmi* – including Jewish – orphaned child, would be taken into custody by the authorities and converted to Islam.³¹ The decree is often described as one of the most traumatizing collective experiences of Yemeni Jews.³² In addition to the impact it had on individuals and families, the decree also posed a threat to the very existence of the Jewish community in Yemen.

In 1947, strikes organized in Aden against the UN's decision to partition Palestine turned into bloody riots that led to the deaths of 82 Jewish people.³³ Shops were looted,

homes and schools burnt. This is thought to have been the main trigger behind the airlift of Yemeni Jews to Israel, beginning in 1949, though many of those who left were also motivated by socio-economic reasons and the desire for a better life.

Between 1949 and 1950, an estimated 49,000³⁴ Yemeni Jews were airlifted to Israel in a secret operation that was named Operation Magic Carpet, or Wings of Eagles. Only 3,500 remained. Large waves of migration came to a halt with the 1962 war in the north of Yemen. A travel ban remained in place until 1992. While estimates varied, in 2005, the remaining Jews of Yemen were thought to number between 200 and 500.³⁵ However, according to some research, between 1,500 and 2,000 Yemeni Jews may have stayed in the country but concealed their religious identity for fear of persecution.³⁶

The situation for those who stayed continued to deteriorate in the years that followed. The remaining Jews in Yemen were mostly centred in Saada and in Raida. They lived with limited opportunities and under the predefined social status of *dhimmis*. This also meant they were considered 'tribal protégés', as the tribal system imposed on tribesmen, as a matter of honour, the protection of the 'weak', which included Yemeni Jews.³⁷

Incidents of violence against Yemeni Jews nevertheless continued to occur. In 2008, Moshe Ya'ich Al-Nahare, a Jewish resident of Raida, a city north of Sana'a that retained one of the largest concentrations of Yemeni Jews, was killed by another resident who reportedly shouted 'Convert or die!' The court first considered the murderer to be 'mentally imbalanced',³⁸ he was eventually sentenced to death but escaped from prison. During and after the trial, Al-Nahare's family came under constant pressure from the killer's tribe to accept blood money in return for sparing his life. Al-Nahare's family reportedly left the country as a result.³⁹ In May 2012, Aharon Zindani, another Yemeni Jew, was reportedly accused of witchcraft and stabbed to death in a market in Sana'a.⁴⁰

Saada's remaining Jews were among thousands of internally displaced persons who left the region from 2006 onwards following the outbreak of conflict in the area. MRG could not obtain any direct testimonies as to the nature of the threats that made them leave Saada; reports widely allege they were targeted with violence or threat of violence, harassment and were at risk of forced conversion by members of the Houthis during the years of the conflict.⁴¹ A number of Jews from Raida and Saada were offered shelter by former President Saleh in a compound that used to be under government protection, called the 'touristic city', in Sana'a. Some have left the country since.

While reports differ as to the exact number of Jews remaining in Yemen, our interviewees reported there were presently 83 members of the community, mainly divided between Sana'a and Raida. They keep a low profile, with men tucking away their *payots* or sidelocks, and practise their religious rituals in the privacy of their homes. There have

been sporadic accounts over the last year of continued threats and violence against members of the Jewish community.⁴² Houthi leaders say that their sentiments are against ‘Zionism and the occupation of Palestine’ but that Yemeni Jews should not be afraid.⁴³ Information obtained in the course of our research suggests that the stipends that were previously given to Yemeni Jews by the government after their move to Sana’a have now stopped, leaving them destitute.⁴⁴

For the Jews of Yemen, the future is what they are living right now. The few who remain are facing the burden of war, as all Yemenis are, but also the burden of having no freedoms, no means of subsistence, and living in constant fear of becoming the next scapegoat in many

people’s eyes. Like those who left the country in 1949, the Yemeni Jews forced to flee Saada almost 60 years later had to abandon everything they knew or owned. Today, those who have not gone into exile are living in confinement:

‘I have stopped wanting to speak. People come and go ... people speak in our name ... we remain with the consequences of their words.... We hold a memory, years of memory, but if words are of silver, silence is of gold today.... Forgive my harsh words, they come from a place of hurt ...’

Excerpts from interviews with a Yemeni Jew living in Sana’a, between September and December 2015

Caste-based discrimination in Yemen: the case of the Muhamasheen

'From Akhdam to Muhamasheen: the terminology changed, but our situation remained the same.'

Muhamasheen community member, Sana'a,
March 2015

Yemen's long history as a tribal society continues to govern its social structures to this day, presenting a parallel system of governance and traditions in many parts of the country alongside the formal Yemeni state.⁴⁵ This in turn permeates the country's social order, creating a form of social hierarchy. But, in addition to these social dynamics, there are groups that suffer from caste-based discrimination, such as the Muhamasheen, who, according to some, account for up to 10 per cent⁴⁶ of Yemen's population. Their marginalization becomes especially acute in the context of the deepening humanitarian disaster.

Al Muhamasheen translates as 'the marginalized' and is a word that designates a group that was – and to a large extent remains – commonly known in Yemen as the *Akhdam*, or the servants. There are controversies about the ethnic origins of the group. Some believe they are descended from African slaves or Ethiopian soldiers from as far back as the sixth century.⁴⁷ Others nevertheless think they are of Yemeni origin. *Al Muhamasheen* is the term that was adopted by the group itself to escape the derogatory term of *Akhdam*. It came to our attention that to some Yemenis, including some aid workers, references to *Al Muhamasheen* were not always understood. One Muhamasheen activist interviewed for this briefing mentioned that some Muhamasheen representatives themselves still refer to their community as the *Akhdam*.

But if terminology plays an important role in deconstructing negative assumptions, and asserting or

rejecting an identity, the reality of daily life for Yemen's Muhamasheen remains, nonetheless, extremely marginalized. The Muhamasheen mostly live in slum areas and on the outskirts of cities, and are mostly confined to menial low-paid jobs, such as garbage collection and cleaning jobs. They suffer from higher rates of unemployment and generally live in poverty.

Muhamasheen are commonly not allowed to marry with non-Muhamasheen people. Reports of violence targeting them, including gender-based violence, are rife. The fact that they fall outside the tribal and societal structure means they have little access to redress or mediation. While laws in Yemen do not specifically discriminate against Muhamasheen, discrimination against them permeates the entire Yemeni system, including administrative structures, local and traditional authorities. As a result they find themselves either denied access to many rights – including civil and political rights – or without the ability or awareness to access their rights. In a country where birth registration rates are already as low as 17 per cent, only 9 per cent of Muhamasheen reportedly register their children at birth.⁴⁸ A survey conducted by UNICEF (the UN Children's Fund) of 9,200 households, covering 51,406 Muhamasheen, also highlighted the terrible living conditions facing the community and their lack of access to basic services such as water, sanitation and education, as well as the limited economic opportunities available to them. The report stated that 'one in five people aged 15 or over could read or write and only two in four children aged 6 to 17 are enrolled in school, though the average is nearly twice this figure... Only two in five Muhamasheen houses had a latrine.'⁴⁹ As a result of their social marginalization, Muhamasheen communities have suffered a history of violence, social exploitation and political manipulation.

During the 2011 uprising in Yemen, many Muhamasheen took to the streets with other citizens, calling for social change. During the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) that ensued, the community was represented by just one out of a total of 565 delegates. Nevertheless, one positive result was the inclusion of a provision in the NDC outcomes stipulating 'fair national policies and procedures to ensure marginalized persons' access to decent housing, basic public services, free health care, and job opportunities'.⁵⁰ However, with the subsequent breakdown of the frail national consensus and Yemen's slide into conflict, there was no opportunity to translate these provisions into real change for the community.



TWO MUHAMASHEEN CHILDREN RIDING A REFUSE COLLECTION TRUCK WITH A SLOGAN THAT READS 'CLEANLINESS IS THE BEST IMAGE FOR MY COUNTRY' IN SANA'A © RANIA EL RAJJI

Under siege: the conflict's impact on Muhamasheen

'Even war discriminates.'

Yemeni activist, Sana'a, November 2015

The war that ravaged Yemen since March 2015 has had a devastating impact on Muhamasheen. The cities most affected by conflict – Aden, Taiz and, more recently, Hodeida – had large concentrations of Muhamasheen. Muhamasheen neighbourhoods in Taiz were hit very early on by coalition airstrikes, and Muhamasheen were among the first to be internally displaced. Saada also had a concentration of Muhamasheen who were displaced to other governorates, such as Amran, when Saada was heavily bombed by the coalition in April 2015.

Their experience of displacement has nevertheless been very different from that of other Yemenis. While all interviewees said that their needs, mainly food and water, were commonly shared and their 'sorrows the same',⁵¹ the geography and experience of their displacement reflect inherent patterns of discrimination within Yemeni society. In most cities, Muhamasheen moved into open lands instead of public institutions and schools. While in some localities that were less affected by the war, host communities and local authorities attempted to support internally displaced population from areas such as Saada to the extent possible, our interviews in three main locations show that Muhamasheen were largely left to their own devices. In parts of Amran, for instance, they were reportedly asked to evacuate agricultural land by landowners.

In Taiz, Muhamasheen first moved into parks and open spaces where some built shelters, then most into schools in the Hoban area. While they are presently being asked to evacuate the schools, their lack of tribal connections means they have no native villages to return to. They have not been allowed to stay on most land where they have taken refuge, either by the sheikhs or by the local Aqel Al Harra (a local neighbourhood chief), and are not seen as being equal partners in negotiating for access to land. The lack of documentation among Muhamasheen communities could also have an impact on their ability to benefit from aid distributions. In addition to the scarcities created by the countrywide and inland blockades, Muhamasheen have reported being sidelined on distribution lists because of discrimination, further reducing their access to the limited humanitarian assistance available. On 21 December 2015, Muhamasheen activists informed MRG that sheikhs in a specific location in Taiz had diverted part of an aid distribution⁵² destined for Muhamasheen. Protests by community members were reportedly met with threats of violence. This report resonates with similar concerns raised over sheikhs diverting part of the aid in a number of locations.

Due to their lack of access to safer locations and the fact that they are constantly being pushed back and

displaced, in areas such as Taiz Muhamasheen are presently moving into highly volatile locations, closer to the fighting or in proximity to military zones. The absence of adequate mapping of the location of Muhamasheen in the areas most affected by conflict further adds to the difficulties of reaching them and making accessible to them whatever protection mechanisms might otherwise be available.

In an interview with women from a Muhamasheen internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in the governorate of Amran, they recalled how one of them had suffered from heavy bleeding late in her pregnancy and needed hospitalization. As one respondent explained, 'We did not know where to go or what to do with her, although there is a clinic and hospital in town. We found a way of taking her back to Saada to deliver and get help.'⁵³ Another group stated that some had returned to Saada because they felt that the treatment and living conditions in the host areas and camps were so demeaning that they 'preferred the bombs'.⁵⁴

On 2 December 2015, a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) mobile clinic, which had been operating in Al Hoban area since October, was hit by a coalition airstrike.⁵⁵ MSF reported the clinic had provided urgent medical care for 480 patients in a matter of two days. The main displaced population of Al Hoban are Muhamasheen. A Muhamasheen activist in Taiz told MRG that the clinic had been dealing with cases of scabies, one of the many outbreaks of the war.⁵⁶ MSF reported there were nine injuries from the airstrike. However, on 5 December, MRG received unconfirmed information that one of the displaced patients wounded during the airstrike had died.⁵⁷

According to MSF, the GPS (global positioning system) coordinates of the health structure had been regularly and recently communicated to the coalition.⁵⁸ On 4 December, the coalition command in Saudi Arabia stated that it had formed a fact-finding committee to investigate the incident.⁵⁹ At the time this report went to publication, it was still unclear whether the committee had been formed and the results of the inquiry had not been made public. While this was not the first attack on a Muhamasheen area or neighbourhood, various interviewees stressed the need to investigate why such attacks had occurred and to look into the behaviour of the various parties to the conflict with regard to Muhamasheen communities, both in IDP camps and in civilian settlements in various parts of the country.

Although MRG is not able to verify these figures, sources within Muhamasheen communities in Taiz informed us there were 825 identified Muhamasheen families in Taiz alone, living in small or large gatherings in IDP settlements or schools and public buildings.⁶⁰ In addition to these families, the sources claim there are around 650 additional families spread out across the city in open areas, abandoned buildings and old houses. To these families, survival is a daily challenge in a city many described as 'struggling for air'.⁶¹

While all Yemenis are suffering the reality of war and the prospect of more devastation and poverty, the burden



A YOUNG MUHAMASHEEN GIRL WASHES CLOTHES BY HER TENT IN AN IDP CAMP © RANIA EL RAJJI

of conflict is the heaviest on the most vulnerable. Those who have not been displaced are at risk of death or serious injury, and those who have been displaced are at risk of exclusion, hunger, disease and further violence. While some young girls are forced into early marriage to escape poverty and to ease some of the economic burdens of their families,⁶² boys are being taken to the frontlines. A Muhamasheen activist informed MRG that members of his community, including young boys, are being forcibly recruited by various parties to the conflict. To the Muhamasheen, escape is not even an option.

'They have no power. Those who refuse face death. Yet death is the only option anyway.'

Muhamasheen activist, Taiz, December 2015

Yemen's refugee and migrant populations

'We will not leave. This country has given us its good days. We will walk through its bad days.'

Ethiopian migrant who chose to remain in Sana'a, November 2015

Yemen has been a country of destination and transit for refugees (largely Somalis)⁶³ and migrants (mainly Ethiopians) from the Horn of Africa for decades, many of whom rely on smugglers to undertake the dangerous crossing through the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden to Yemen. Despite the onset of the conflict, thousands of migrants continued to head towards Yemeni shores. From January to October 2015, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported 71,780 documented new arrivals into Yemen.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, thousands have been evacuated while many remain stranded in the country, despite multiple evacuations by agencies such as the International Organization on Migration (IOM).⁶⁵

Many are undocumented and hence unaccounted for. In October 2015, tens of Ethiopian migrants were sleeping in the streets of Sana'a, opposite the Ethiopian embassy, in the hope they would be repatriated.⁶⁶ UNHCR, in its planning strategy for 2016, has estimated that more than 200,000 refugees, migrants and returnees, either in Yemen or fleeing the conflict to neighbouring countries such as Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan, will require assistance.⁶⁷

Like the Muhamasheen, refugees and migrants do not benefit from tribal or other local support mechanisms. And like the Muhamasheen, they are vulnerable to violence and exploitation partly for who they are. The lack of legal documentation many migrants suffer from increases their vulnerabilities in the present context.

Conclusion

'And so it goes; every day we bear our wounds and chant our martyrs [referring to civilians] to their graves.'

Yemeni activist in Taiz, December 2015

While shedding light on issues faced by some of Yemen's minorities today, much remains to be said about the humanitarian and protection needs of the entire Yemeni civilian population, including other minorities.

In too many parts of the world, conflicts can become protracted, and ethnic and sectarian lines become lines of division, even in societies with no history of sectarian strife. The toll of these wars continually falls on civilians and, even more so, on the smallest and most marginalized communities.

In Yemen, existing patterns of discrimination before the outbreak of the current conflict have been deepened in a context of instability, violence and protracted humanitarian crisis. Humanitarian organizations' limited capacities, access and ability to monitor distributions have further exacerbated the vulnerabilities of communities such as the Muhamasheen.

While their plight is shared by millions of other Yemeni civilians whose lives have been devastated, the particular challenges facing minorities must be incorporated into broader humanitarian efforts to protect and assist those on the front line of the conflict. In particular, in a context where community members may be sidelined when it comes to aid distribution and prevented from relocating to

safer areas, targeted measures must be in place to ensure they are not excluded.

The rise in sectarian tensions, hate speech and targeted attacks on religious communities is of great concern and points towards the long-term reverberations of the conflict on Yemeni society in its various social and religious components. While a great deal of attention should be focused on the rise of religious extremism, the international community should ensure that it is addressed with the best interest of the Yemeni people at heart and away from global and regional counter-terrorism policies and strategies.

The international community has failed Yemen in many ways, if only by turning a blind eye to a devastating humanitarian crisis and a conflict tearing an entire country, its population and social fabric apart. The lack of real engagement on the part of regional and international bodies, such as the UN Security Council, has only exacerbated the dire humanitarian and human rights situation.

The final word belongs to a member of a minority, whose request represents an urgent plea addressed to policy makers, the international community and all parties to the conflict in Yemen, to ensure that the protection of minorities remains a priority and hopefully a guiding principle.

'Keep asking for answers: tell the specialized [international] bodies about what is happening to the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable of all.'

Member of a religious minority in Yemen,
December 2015

Recommendations

To the government of Yemen, various governmental and local authorities, and all parties to the conflict:⁶⁸

- *Secure the protection of all minorities, religious and other, including migrants, in Yemen today.* Issue clear instructions for local authorities and command structures of various armed forces to make sure minorities are protected, and able to move and access humanitarian assistance.
- *Ensure equal treatment and access to services for all civilians affected by war and displacement,* including their secure movement to safety wherever needed.
- *Provide alternative shelter and assistance where needed to all internally displaced, including Muhamasheen.* Refrain from forced expulsions from schools (and other public buildings), and ensure internally displaced persons are offered alternative safe accommodation.
- *Undertake regular and thorough data collection and needs assessments and make sure the results are regularly communicated to UN and other humanitarian agencies.* This should include the locations and numbers of minorities at risk, such as the Muhamasheen. Particular attention should be paid to data disaggregation wherever security conditions allow, in order to identify the most vulnerable, including minority children, women, elderly and persons with disabilities.
- *Ensure that the National Commission of Inquiry conducts effective and transparent investigations into alleged violations of human rights and international humanitarian law,* including those targeting minorities and other vulnerable groups.
- *Ensure that all human rights violations against members of minorities are quickly investigated and documented, and their perpetrators brought to account.* Where (or when) courts are functioning, perpetrators should be brought to justice and tried in accordance with international standards.
- *The coalition and parties to the conflict should undertake prompt, effective and transparent investigations into all suspected incidents of international humanitarian law violations,* including attacks on Muhamasheen areas.
- *All parties to the conflict should provide access to and collaborate with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to support independent documentation and reporting of all violations committed during the conflict, including those targeting or affecting minorities.*
- *Lift all access restrictions and ensure the safe and unhindered access of humanitarian organizations and*

workers to all areas affected by conflict and to all vulnerable populations, including in Taiz and other regions.

- *Condemn and refrain from using incitement to violence and other forms of hate speech* against all religious groups including minorities in Yemen.
- *Guarantee that any future reconciliation or political process involves all of Yemen's minority groups,* and represents their voices, concerns and need for protection by law and practice.

To the international community:

- *The international community, and in particular members of the UN Human Rights Council and donor countries, should push for independent and effective investigations into suspected violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the Yemen conflict.* This includes allegations of indiscriminate attacks on IDP camps, Muhamasheen settlements and targeted attacks against minorities.
- *OHCHR should increase its presence in the country and play a leading role in documenting and reporting on all human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law,* including those targeting or particularly affecting minority groups.
- *The UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues should pay specific attention to the situation of minorities in Yemen,* liaising with other UN mechanisms to ensure oversight and action where required.
- *The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief should pay specific attention to the situation of religious minorities in Yemen* and report on acts of violence and the escalation of hate speech and its impact in Yemen.
- *Foreign governments, including Security Council member states, should push for the blockade to be lifted,* ensuring that humanitarian assistance as well as essential commodities, including food, fuel and medicines, can enter the country without restrictions.
- *Humanitarian organizations and UN agencies should expand their operations and field presence in Yemen,* and push for more access to areas and communities most affected by conflict, including minorities such as the Muhamasheen.
- *Humanitarian organizations and UN agencies should ensure that assessments are made at the level of vulnerable communities, including Muhamasheen areas,* and that the locations, numbers and needs of Muhamasheen, other minorities, refugees and migrants are constantly analysed and met by adequate humanitarian and

protection efforts. The distribution and allocation of aid should be closely monitored to ensure it is reaching populations that need it the most.

- *The international community should ensure that specific attention is paid to the situation of all minorities in Yemen, and that hate speech as well as acts of targeted violence are swiftly and strongly condemned; pressure should be put on all parties to refrain from acts of violence against minorities, and to ensure that no such acts are committed.*
- *The international community should ensure that any talks or future political solution to the conflict includes the issue of reparations – including financial compensations – by parties to the conflict (where possible) and the coalition specifically, to all civilians, including minority groups, affected by violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law.*

Notes

- 1 Figures provided by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), retrieved 4 January 2016, <http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-monthly-factsheet-november-2015-enar>.
- 2 Arabia Felix – meaning ‘happy’ or ‘fortunate’ – was the ancient Latin name given by geographers to the territory that now comprises Yemen and the province of Asir in Saudi Arabia. It mainly referred to the fact it was a comparatively fertile land in the midst of the otherwise arid surrounding region.
- 3 The KSA-led coalition includes the active membership of the United Arab Emirates, Sudan, Egypt, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan and Morocco. Somalia also provides the coalition with access to its air space, military bases and territorial waters. A number of Western states are providing the coalition with weapons, and some are actively involved in military support and advice, such as the US, or providing liaison officers such as the UK.
- 4 Reuters, ‘Yemen’s Hadi flees to Aden and says he is still president’, 21 February 2015, retrieved 4 January 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-idUSKBN0LP08F20150221>.
- 5 Figures provided by the office of the UNHCR, retrieved 4 January 2016, <http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-monthly-factsheet-november-2015-enar> and at <http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/4-facts-yemen-after-9-months-war>.
- 6 IOM, *Regional refugee and migrant response: Impact of the Yemen crisis*, 15 December 2015.
- 7 Keaten, J., ‘Dutch end bid for UN fact-finding mission in war-torn Yemen’, Associated Press, 30 September 2015.
- 8 Interview with a Yemeni aid worker from Taiz.
- 9 Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) and OCHA, *State of Crisis: Explosive Weapons in Yemen*, London, AOAV, September 2015, p. 5.
- 10 For more, see reports such as by Amnesty International’s, retrieved 4 January 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/yemen> and by Human Rights Watch (HRW), retrieved <https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/yemen>.
- 11 These estimates are provided in the absence of official statistics, see ‘Yemen’, *International Religious Freedom Report 2014*, U.S. Department of State, p. 2.
- 12 Al Arabiya, ‘Yemen Al Qaeda denounces barbaric beheadings’, 8 December 2014, retrieved 4 January 2016, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/12/08/Yemen-s-al-Qaeda-denounces-barbaric-beheadings-.html>. Also see ‘Analysis: why AQAP quickly denied any connection to mosque attacks’, 20 March 2015, retrieved 4 January 2016, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/03/analysis-why-aqap-quickly-denied-any-connection-to-mosque-attacks.php>.
- 13 Interview with NGO worker and analyst on Yemen, September 2015.
- 14 See Al Jazeera, ‘Deadly explosion hits Zaidi mosque in Yemen’, 2 September 2015.
- 15 Reuters, ‘Suicide bombers kill 137 in Yemen mosque attacks’, 20 March 2015.
- 16 Interviews with various analysts and members of religious minorities, June to December 2015.
- 17 Twelver Shiism is the official religion of Iran.
- 18 People who fall under this lineage are known as the *Sada*, plural of *Sayyid*.
- 19 Badr el-Din Al Houthi, father of Hussein Al Houthi, said in an interview with *Al-Wasat* newspaper that the imamate was the preferable form of governance for Yemen only if the ‘true and legitimate’ Imam was to be found and that, in the absence of such an imam, ‘any just believer’ would be entitled to rule. See Philips, S., ‘Cracks in the Yemeni system’, Middle East Research and Information Project, 28 July 2005.
- 20 For example, see Burrowes, R.D., *Historical Dictionary of Yemen*, Plymouth, Scarecrow Books, 2010, p. 201.
- 21 The Fatimids were an Ismaili dynasty that ruled an empire in parts of North Africa and the Middle East between 909 and 1171 AD.
- 22 U.S. Department of State, ‘Yemen’, in *Religious Freedom Report 2005*, 2005.
- 23 Reuters, ‘Islamic State claims car bomb in Yemen capital: four dead’, 29 July 2015, retrieved 4 January 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/07/29/us-yemen-security-bombing-idUSKCN0Q31TC20150729>.
- 24 Statement by the Islamic State-Sana’a Province, retrieved 4 January 2016, <http://www.cssn.tk/2015/07/A23.html>.
- 25 Finn, T., ‘Out of Aden: Yemeni refugees in Djibouti recall horrors of war’, Middle East Eye, 24 June 2015.
- 26 Johari, A., ‘India’s Bohra Muslims are back safely from Yemen but have many reasons to still be anxious’, Scroll.in, 9 April 2015, retrieved 1 December 2015, <http://scroll.in/article/719205/indias-bohra-muslims-are-back-safely-from-yemen-but-have-many-reasons-to-still-be-anxious>.
- 27 Interview with two Ismaili activists in Yemen and India, December 2015.
- 28 One example is a Friday prayer sermon attributed – although this is unconfirmed – to Sheikh Al-Sudais, Imam of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, that characterizes the wars in the Middle East and in Yemen as a war with Iran, and a sectarian war between Sunnis and Shi’a. It includes specific hate speech against the Ismailis, the Jews and the Christians, whom it refers to as the Cross.
- 29 The name and initials have been changed for security reasons.
- 30 The crown decree, first introduced in 1673, remained in place until the Turkish invasion in 1872. The decree obliged Yemeni Jews to go bareheaded, a measure extremely offensive for the pious. See Gerber, S., *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience*, London, Simon & Schuster, 1994.
- 31 See for instance Goiten, S.D., *Jews and Arabs*, New York, Schocken Books, 1955, or Parfitt, T., *The Road to Redemption: The Jews of the Yemen – 1900 to 1950*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1996.
- 32 For example, see Juergensmeyer, M. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook for Global Religions*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 205.
- 33 Ahroni, R., *The Jews of the British Crown Colony of Aden: History, Culture and Ethnic Relations*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1994, p. 211.
- 34 The Yemenite Jews who were airlifted were mainly from northern Yemen, but an estimated 1,500 were from Aden. There were also a few hundred Djiboutian and Eritrean Jews who were part of the airlift.
- 35 U.S. Department of State, ‘Yemen’, in *Religious Freedom Report 2005*, retrieved 4 January 2016, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51614.htm>
- 36 Research, including interviews with a number of Yemeni researchers and journalists, conducted by the author in the north of Yemen in 2006.
- 37 See Dresch, P., *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1989.
- 38 Julius, L., ‘The tragedy of the Yemeni Jews’, *The Guardian*, 7 June 2009.
- 39 Nordland, R., ‘Persecution defines life for Yemen’s remaining Jews’, New York Times, 18 February 2015. See also interview with Moshe Al Nahari’s wife and father during the trial, retrieved 4 January 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_IV7RRuDTA
- 40 ‘Podolsky, P., ‘Murdered Yemenite Jew’s body brought to Israel’, *The Times of Israel*, 20 June 2012.
- 41 For example, see Al-Moahki, A.I., ‘Damn the Jews: proving more than just a slogan’, *Yemen Times*, 18 February 2015.
- 42 For instance, two Yemeni Jews residing in Sana’a were reportedly approached and beaten up in the old city on 21 January 2015. See *ibid*.
- 43 *Ibid*.
- 44 Interviews conducted in October and November 2015.

- 45 In the words of former speaker of parliament, the late Abdallah Al Ahmar, 'democracy does not overshadow the *qabilah* (meaning tribe), because the *qabilah* is above everything except religion'. See Von Bruck, G., *Islam, Memory, and Morality in Yemen: Ruling Families in Transition*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 8.
- 46 There are no accurate figures on the number of Muhamasheen in Yemen. While the U.S. Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011 (available at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/186667.pdf>) stated they numbered around 2 to 5 per cent of the general population, other reports by organizations such as the International Dalit Solidarity Network state that they account for around 10 per cent of the general population (retrieved 4 January 2016, <http://idsn.org/yemen-groundbreaking-unicef-survey-reveals-enormous-welfare-gap-between-al-akhdam-and-the-general-population>). The UN OHCHR reports that they might number between 500,000 and 3.5 million (see A/HRC/30/31, 7 September 2015, para. 77).
- 47 MRG, *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples – Yemen*, accessed 1 December 2015.
- 48 UNICEF, *UNICEF Yemen Situation Report – Key Focus: Muhamasheen Mapping Update*, January 2015, retrieved 1 December 2015, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNICEF%20Yemen%20SitRep%20January%202015.pdf>
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 Al-Yasiri, A., 'The plight of Yemen's Muhamasheen', *Yemen Times*, 6 May 2014.
- 51 Interview with a Muhamasheen IDP, Amran, November 2015.
- 52 Our sources reported the distribution had been provided by a UN agency.
- 53 Interview with women from a Muhamasheen IDP camp in Amran, October 2015.
- 54 Exchange with Muhamasheen IDPs in Amran, November 2015.
- 55 MSF, 'Yemen: nine wounded in Saudi-led coalition airstrike on MSF clinic in Taiz', 3 December 2015, retrieved 9 December 2015, <http://www.msf.org/article/yemen-nine-wounded-saudi-led-coalition-airstrike-msf-clinic-taiz>
- 56 Interview with Muhamasheen activist from Taiz, December 2015.
- 57 Correspondence with Muhamasheen activist from Taiz, December 2015.
- 58 MSF, *op. cit.*
- 59 'Yemen: Coalition command urges humanitarian organizations to conduct beforehand coordination with it before taking a base inside cities', statement retrieved 4 January 2016, <http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/coalition-command-urges-humanitarian-organizations-conduct-beforehand-coordination-it>.
- 60 These reportedly include 164 families spread out in five main schools: 36 families in the Ha'el Saeed school, 66 families in Bin Affan school, 47 families in Al Furqan school, 8 families in the Jeel Al Wehda school, and 7 in Al Rasheed school. They also include a settlement of 53 families in the area of Kahhaf and Karbad, 33 families in Kahhaf Al Ali, 43 families in Jabal Manee'e, 71 families in the area of Al Sareeh, 211 families in Jabal Ramee, and 250 families in the settlement of Wadi Al Quba, which was recently bombed by coalition planes.
- 61 This refers to the impact of the countrywide embargo and the siege on Taiz, which, among other things, has resulted in the closure of hospitals and a scarcity of medical equipment, including oxygen. Based on exchanges with Yemeni activists in Taiz and elsewhere, December 2015.
- 62 Interviews with Muhamasheen activists and community members, November to December 2015.
- 63 UNHCR, 'As fighting intensifies in Yemen, more flee to Djibouti', 11 November 2015, retrieved 4 January 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org.uk/news-and-views/news-list/news-detail/article/as-fighting-in-yemen-intensifies-more-flee-to-djibouti.html>
- 64 UNHCR, *New Arrivals in Yemen Comparison 2012–2015*, 31 October 2015, retrieved 4 January 2016, <http://reliefweb.int/map/yemen/new-arrivals-yemen-comparison-2012-2015-31-october-2015-enar>
- 65 IOM, *Yemen Crisis Regional Response Situation Report*, 26 November 2015, pp. 4–5.
- 66 Interviews with Ethiopian migrants and Yemeni activists, October and November 2015.
- 67 UNHCR, *Yemen Situation – Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan: October–December 2015*, January–December 2016 (Preliminary Estimates), October 2015, p. 2, retrieved 4 January 2016, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/RRMRP%20Yemen%20Crisis%2020151005.pdf>.
- 68 Depending on areas under the control of various groups; these also include the Saudi-led coalition.

working to secure the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples

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'Even war discriminates': Yemen's minorities, exiled at home

Since the onset of the Saudi-led military campaign in March 2015, the conflict in Yemen has dramatically escalated, resulting in thousands of deaths and injuries. Millions are now struggling with internal displacement and the risk of further violence, with no end to hostilities in sight. This situation has been exacerbated by a protracted blockade by the international coalition, severely restricting the import of much needed supplies of food, water and medicine.

Though the impacts of ongoing insecurity and the deepening humanitarian crisis have affected all of Yemen's civilian population, the country's religious and ethnic minorities are especially vulnerable due to their long history of exclusion. *'Even war discriminates': Yemen's minorities, exiled at home* highlights the particular challenges facing its most marginalized groups and the ways that established patterns of discrimination have deepened in the context of the current conflict.

Besides exploring the experiences of religious minorities such as Yemen's Jewish community against a backdrop of rising extremism, the report also examines how the Muhamasheen – a group traditionally sidelined from Yemen's social hierarchy – have struggled to access land, protection or humanitarian assistance due to their continued treatment as second-class citizens. The report provides a series of recommendations for the Yemeni government, the international community and all parties to the conflict to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the civilian population is prioritized, with particular attention paid to the country's minorities.

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