

YEMEN

REPUBLIC OF YEMEN

Head of state: 'Ali 'Abdullah Saleh

Head of government: 'Abdul Qader Bajammal (replaced 'Abd al-Karim 'Ali al-Iryani in March)

Capital: Sana'a

Population: 19.1 million

Official language: Arabic

Death penalty: retentionist

Arrests of political suspects and harassment of critics of the government took place in various parts of the country. At least two political trials were held. Torture and a death in custody were reported. At least 56 people were executed and scores, possibly hundreds, were under sentence of death at the end of 2001.

Background

While human rights gained unprecedented visibility in terms of both formal bureaucratic structures and grassroots activism, human rights violations were on the increase as compared with previous years.

In March a new government was sworn in and Wahiba Fare' was appointed as Minister of State for Human Rights. In August she held talks with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and agreed on technical cooperation and support in the field of human rights, particularly in relation to recommendations issued in 1999 by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. In August, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights announced that it had appointed a human rights officer based in Sana'a, and that its program of cooperation included "assistance in the elaboration of regulatory procedures for dealing with children in conflict with the law, various seminars and training sessions, provision of training manuals on international human rights standards to law enforcement officials, and promoting the inclusion of children's rights in university curricula". The Minister was also reported to have agreed to cooperate with the association of journalists on initiatives aimed at spreading and consolidating a culture of respect for human rights.

Various seminars and workshops on human rights were organized by different organizations. These activities received wide media coverage highlighting issues such as discrimination and violence against women and prison conditions faced by women.

Political participation was expanded by the addition of a second chamber of parliament, the *Majlis al-Shura* (Consultative Council), and the introduction of elected local government assemblies. The Consultative Council, consisting of 111 members, was appointed by the President in May. The members included heads of political parties and tribal leaders chosen by the President. The term of office of the President was extended from five to seven years and that of parliament from four to five years.

However, in contrast to these positive developments, there were continuing clashes between government forces and tribal groups and violent inter-tribal conflicts in different parts of the country throughout the year. According to reports, scores of people were killed and more than 100 injured, including members of the security forces. The local elections in February were marked by a number of armed clashes caused by disputes between parties and candidates over registration and voting regulations. The elections were won by the General People's Congress, the main ruling party.

The attacks in the USA on 11 September increased political tension in Yemen which was placed under a *de facto* state of emergency with the Prime Minister reportedly declaring: "We have decided that investigations must be carried out into anyone who had any connection... [with] Afghanistan".

Arrests

Widespread arrests of political suspects were carried out in different parts of the country throughout the year, particularly in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks. Those arrested before 11 September included people detained after clashes between security forces and tribes, and following bombing incidents as well as people suspected of having links with armed Islamist organizations such as *al-Jihad* and the Aden-Abyan Army. They also included people detained after peaceful protests. Many were released after short periods of detention without trial. The exact number of those who remained held at the end of the year was not known although some of them were brought to trial during the year (see below).

Following the 11 September attacks in the USA, the government carried out widespread waves of arrests, reportedly after information was submitted by the US government on suspected supporters of Osama bin Laden. Those targeted for investigation and arrest included members of Islamist organizations and anyone who had aroused the suspicion of the authorities.

☞ Two people, 'Abdelsalam Nur al-Din, Director of the Institute of the Centre for Red Sea Studies (CRSS) at Exeter University in the United Kingdom, and his colleague, Ahmad Saif, were arrested without a judicial warrant at the end of October by members of the Political Security police in Sana'a. They were detained at the headquarters of the Political Security and interrogated on suspicion of being spies and of having connections with Osama bin Laden. They were held incommunicado for three days, during which time they were allegedly held in solitary confinement and beaten. They were released without charge only following the intervention of some government officials. Both were in Yemen on an official fact-finding visit to establish joint cooperation projects between the CRSS and Yemen University as well as other official institutions. Prior to their arrest they had meetings with different government officials, including ministers.

The exact number of people arrested in the wake of 11 September who remained in detention was not known; the government acknowledged 21 arrests while press reports indicated up to 500 were detained at the end of the year.

Harassment of journalists

In an address to members of the journalists' association in September, the Minister of State for Human Rights was reported to have said that "press freedom and human rights are two faces of one coin". However, this did not put an end to a pattern of harassment of journalists critical of the government or its policies who continued to face legal proceedings and arrest.

In November the editors of eight different newspapers and magazines were reportedly asked to appear before the West Sana'a Court to answer lawsuits brought against them. One involved a case brought by the Ministry of Information against the *al-Shura* newspaper for publishing excerpts from a novel which was "inconsistent with the Islamic religion". The outcome of the court hearing was not known at the end of the year.

☞ Hassan al-Zaidi, a journalist with the weekly newspaper the *Yemen Times*, was arrested twice, in June and September, and detained for up to three weeks each time by the Political Security in an undisclosed location. He was reportedly arrested for having interviewed a kidnapped German tourist being held hostage while security forces were trying to locate the kidnapers.

Political prisoners and unfair trials

At least two political trials involving people charged in connection with bombing incidents in 2000 were started during the year.

☞ Four people were tried in connection with the bombing of the British embassy in Sana'a on 13 October 2000 which damaged the building. In February, the defendants appeared before a criminal court which ruled that it was not competent to try the case and referred it to a special court. In June the case opened again before a special court which found the defendants guilty and sentenced them to prison terms ranging between four and 15 years, in addition to payment of the cost of damage caused to the embassy. An appeal by the defendants was pending at the end of the year.

☞ The trial opened in April of at least five alleged members of the Aden-Abyan Army suspected of carrying out the bombings that targeted a church, a hotel and the office of the *Saba* news agency in Aden on 13 October 2000. The exact number of defendants in the case was not known, but they were thought to include the four men tried in connection with the bombing of the British embassy. The defendants faced charges including the illegal possession of bombs, carrying out a bombing attack, disrupting public security and sabotage. However, lawyers for three of the defendants reportedly rejected the charges against their clients.

Torture and ill-treatment

Torture and ill-treatment were reported. There were allegations that people were beaten during interrogation, deprived of sleep or food, prevented from using the toilet, and kept shackled for long periods.

☞ Muhammad 'Abdulah Salem al-Yafi'i, who was serving a

six-year sentence, died in prison in December 2000, allegedly as a result of torture. His relatives reportedly visited him a week before his death and stated that he was in good health at that time. No investigation was known to have been carried out into his death during 2001.

Flogging continued to be imposed as a judicial punishment throughout the country.

Death penalty

At least 56 people were executed in 2001. All were convicted on charges which included murder. Many were sentenced after trial proceedings which did not meet international safeguards for defendants facing capital charges. Although the exact number was not known, reports suggested that scores, possibly hundreds, of people were under sentence of death at the end of 2001.

☞ Hussein bin Hussein al-Ma'mari, who had been diagnosed as suffering from schizophrenia, was executed in August. During his trial in 1998, his lawyer produced strong medical evidence suggesting that he was mentally ill, but the court still convicted him of murder and sentenced him to death.