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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Forum for Development and Human Rights Dialogue, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 May 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



The Freedom of Opinion and Expression

The Forum for Development and Human Rights Dialogue expresses its deep concern about the situation of freedom of opinion and expression in Yemen, as the media diversity and the margin of freedoms that existed before the current war in Yemen have disappeared. Also, the print press has disappeared in the areas in de facto control of the Houthi group and there are a limited number of newspapers affiliated with it or that revolve around it. Moreover, media workers find themselves facing difficult choices either working in media outlets affiliated with the group, leaving its areas, or leaving media work. In addition, nearly half of Yemen's media outlets that existed since before 2014 have been closed, and at least 49 Yemeni journalists have died since 2011. The Houthi movement resorted to using journalists as human shields, after kidnapping two journalists and keeping them captive in a building targeted by airstrikes in 2015, which led to their deaths. The Houthis were also detained in between December 2022 and January 2023 four YouTube content providers for nearly six months, before being pardoned.

Another obstacle for journalists is that many journalists in Yemen can no longer move easily and report facts away from influence, polarization, and fear of oppression. The period of the conflict also contributed to the emergence of funded channels, newspapers, and news websites inside or outside Yemen, which led to the spread of rumors and misleading news that exacerbate the conflict and deepen the state of societal division.

Furthermore, Yemeni women journalists, despite their limited number, are not immune from systematic targeting in various ways and methods that vary between brutal killing, arrest, verbal and physical assault, blackmail, bullying, delving into their symptoms, and distorting their reputation through various electronic and media platforms, which led to the entry of many female journalists into a difficult psychological and humanitarian situation and significantly hindered female journalists from practicing their journalistic work freely, which made many journalists stop their work or remain silent.

It is worth noting that there are some journalists who have been subjected to enforced disappearance, including, for example, journalist Waheed Al-Sufi, who runs Al-Arabiya Online, who has been forcibly disappeared in Houthi prisons since he was arrested from a street in Sana'a on 6 April 2015 and nothing is known about him until today. In addition to the enforced disappearance of journalist Abdul Khaliq Ahmed Omran, journalist Tawfiq Mohammed Al-Mansouri, journalist Akram Saleh Al-Walidi and journalist Al-Harith Saleh Humaid.

Concerning the State of Palestine, we would like to express our concern and regret at the deterioration of freedom of opinion and expression and the rights of journalists in the Palestinian territory, as the journalists in the West Bank suffer from a very repressive and dangerous environment, where there are some arrests and detentions that have affected journalists, human rights defenders, and others, just for criticism and sometimes just for exchanging information about what is happening in Gaza.

Among the cases that have been monitored, BBC journalists (Muhannad Tutunji and Haitham Abu Diab) who were covering the attack on Israel were assaulted and detained at gunpoint after being stopped by police in the Israeli city of Tel Aviv. Al-Jazeera correspondent Samer Abu Daqqa also died after Israeli forces prevented him from reaching the hospital for about 6 hours after he was injured while covering shelling targeting the Farhana school in Khan Yunis. He remained trapped inside the school and was not taken to the hospital, until about six hours later until he was pronounced dead upon arrival at the hospital.

In this regard, the Forum for Development and Human Rights Dialogue calls the parties to the conflict either in Yemen or the State of Palestine to:

- abide by international standards on freedom of opinion and expression and international conventions on human rights,
- ensure compliance with international human rights standards,
- stop practicing violations against journalists and social media activists,

- ensure that civil society actors, including media associations and syndicates and practice their work freely and independently.

We stress that freedom of expression and the press is a fundamental right that should be enjoyed by all individuals unconditionally. We therefore urge all parties to respect press freedom and ensure the full protection of journalists and media professionals, and we call for the promotion and support of press freedom as an essential part of fundamental human rights and as part of building free and democratic societies.
