

Deadly fire in Sanaa 'was all your fault,' UN tells Iran-backed militia

Author:

Mon, 2021-03-15 01:14

AL-MUKALLA, Yemen: The Iran-backed Houthi militia in Yemen were wholly responsible for conditions in an overcrowded migrant detention center in Sanaa where dozens died in a fire, the UN migration agency said on Sunday.

"Conditions in the holding facility, which was three times over capacity, were inhumane and unsafe," said Antonio Vitorino, director general of the International Organization for Migration.

The agency chief rejected attempts by the Houthis to deflect blame on to the UN, and he denied the militia's claims that his organization had neglected the center and failed to install safety equipment, and had refused to send the migrants back to their home countries.

"The IOM does not establish, manage or supervise detention centers in Yemen or anywhere else in the world," he said. "Our teams provided migrants essential services like food, healthcare and water that they otherwise would not have received."

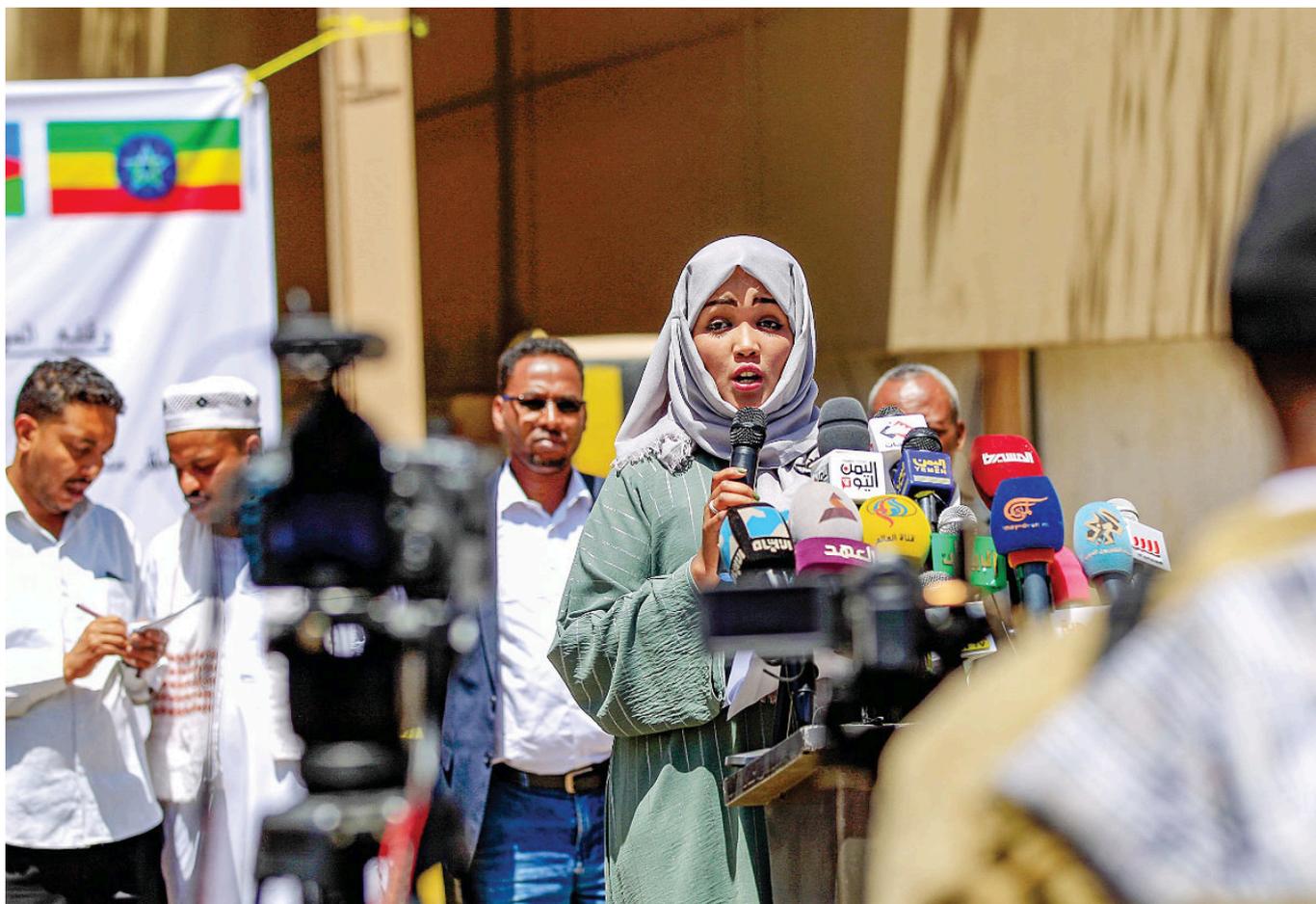
Dozens of local rights groups, activists and government officials have called for an international investigation into the deadly fire on March 7. They accuse the Houthis of hastily burying the dead and intimidating survivors and their families to hide the truth.

The official death toll from the blaze is 43, all migrants from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia and Sudan. Many survivors are being treated in hospital for burns and the effects of smoke inhalation.

However, the true number of deaths is thought to be far higher, possibly in the hundreds. Under local and international pressure to disclose the number of dead, the Houthis forced leaders of east African communities in Sanaa to issue a statement that blamed the UN migration agency.

Dozens of African migrants took part in a protest on Sunday outside the offices of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Aden to demand information about the dead, improvements in their conditions, and for those responsible for the fire to be brought to justice.

"We are so tired, young people died for no reason. There are still lots of injured people in hospital," one migrant said. A survivor displayed his injuries from the fire and other migrants showed graphic images of charred corpses.



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Migrants demand international probe into deadly Yemen fire at Houthi-run detention center
Envoys, rights groups shocked by fire at Houthi-run migrant center fire in Yemen

[Eastern Libya forces say arrested top Daesh figure](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-03-15 01:14

TRIPOLI: Forces loyal to Libyan eastern commander Khalifa Haftar announced Sunday the arrest of a top Daesh figure in the south of the North African country.

The eastern-based marshal's forces led an operation in the southern desert town of Ubari targeting the "most prominent leader" of Daesh in Libya, Mohamed Miloud Mohamed – who goes by Abu Omar – leading to his arrest, said a

statement by Haftar's spokesman Ahmad Al-Mesmari.

Abu Omar was among the top Daesh leaders in Libya when the group took control of the central coastal city of Sirte in 2015, the statement added.

The militants made Sirte a stronghold where they trained fighters and orchestrated attacks, including killing scores of foreign tourists in neighboring Tunisia, before they were driven out of the Libyan city in 2016. Daesh gained a foothold in Libya amid the chaos that reigned in the country after dictator Muammar Qaddafi was toppled and killed in a NATO-backed uprising in 2011.

Described as a "dangerous terrorist," Abu Omar had "close ties" with Abu Moaz Al-Iraqi, the head of Daesh in Libya, who was killed last September by pro-Haftar forces, Mesmari's statement said.

Abu Omar is also accused of having abducted in 2015 four Italian engineers, who were freed after payment of a ransom estimated at four million euros (\$4.8 million), it added.

A political crisis in the wake of Qaddafi's overthrow saw the oil-rich country split between rival authorities in the east and west and the disintegration of security apparatuses, creating fertile ground for militant groups like Daesh to take root.

After Daesh was ousted from Sirte the group was significantly weakened in Libya, but its members have retreated into the desert or blended in with the population on the Mediterranean coast.

A new transitional government was recently approved under a UN-sponsored inter-Libyan dialogue to unify the country's institutions and is due to be sworn in on Monday.



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UN urges foreign troops and mercenaries to leave Libya EU welcomes Libya unity government, warns 'spoilers'

[Son's desperate attempt to save father after Jordanian hospital ran out of oxygen](#)

Mon, 2021-03-15 01:15

AMMAN: The son of an elderly Jordanian man who died from COVID-19 after the hospital ran out of oxygen has described the heartbreaking moments when his father could no longer breathe.

Saleh Awad Allawansah, 75, was one of seven patients who died at the Al-Hussein New Salt Hospital on Saturday in a tragedy that has sparked widespread anger in the kingdom.

Mahmoud Saleh Allawansah told Arab News that the resignation of Jordan's health minister was not enough.

"I hold the prime minister accountable and I wish that legal proceedings take place and that all those involved in this incident receive the right punishment with no mercy," he said, his voice shaking with anger.

Allawansah described how the family had taken his father to the hospital at the start of the month, but noticed straight away the poor standard of care "including medical and security staff, equipment and hygiene."

"We were with my father, sometimes carrying out the duties of nurses and were doing the cleaning to protect him," Allawansah said.

[#LISTEN](#): [#Jordan](#)'s government under increasing pressure from MPs and protests over [#Salthospital](#) oxygen tragedy, [@RaedAlOmari2](#) reports from [#Amman](#) <https://t.co/0t5FkR65Mq>
[pic.twitter.com/xZsMwLVr2j](https://t.co/0t5FkR65Mq)

– Arab News (@arabnews) [March 14, 2021](#)

Despite the family's best efforts, Saleh's condition started to deteriorate.

Last week, doctors told the family that the virus had caused inflammation in the lung and that he required the use of a device to aid his breathing.

"The inflammation was no doubt large but the doctor told us many patients with even worse cases had recovered," Saleh said.

The family said it was about 5:30 a.m. on Saturday when oxygen levels at the hospital started going down.

"It did not come to my mind that there would be an oxygen problem in the hospital because when you talk about oxygen in a modern hospital that all the Salt city residents are proud of ... we never expected a problem," Allawansah said.

"I thought it might be a simple thing maybe caused by the way my father was sitting on the chair. It took me almost 30 minutes changing my father's seating position on the right, left, on the bed and chair until I figured out a position where I felt my father was comfortable.

"Then we sat and put the lights off over the bed. (After) only 15 minutes my father couldn't fight the lack of oxygen, and then my father passed away. I knew it from the change in the computer screen and from the change of the color of his face, which turned yellow. I called the nurses who tried to

resuscitate him but all in vain, my father passed away.”

[#WATCH](#): The moment [#Jordan](#)'s King Abdullah orders the Director of Salt Hospital to submit his resignation following [#COVID19](#) deaths. (: [@AlMamlakaTV](#)) <https://t.co/supawSjZPic.twitter.com/QiclCTjGym>

– Arab News (@arabnews) [March 13, 2021](#)

The hospital's director and four others have been detained for questioning amid the fall out from the tragedy.

King Abdullah visited the facility on Saturday and angrily ordered the director to step down.

Jordan's parliament held emergency sessions on Sunday as protests took place across the country.



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Seven COVID patients die after oxygen fails at Jordan hospital
Jordan MPs demand government stand down over COVID-19 oxygen supply deaths

[Discontent grows among Lebanon's Shiite communities](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-03-15 00:22

BEIRUT: There is growing discontent among Lebanon's Shiite community, with protests in areas that are traditionally supportive of Hezbollah and the Amal Movement.

The protests were in the south and northern Bekaa and came as the national currency continued to slide in value, with the black market dollar exchange rate hitting LBP13,000 on Sunday.

Activist Hussein Ezz El-Din said that many Shiites loyal to the two political parties worked in public institutions or those established by them.

"During the previous period of the popular uprisings, these people did not express their dissatisfaction in the street, and it was impossible to rise (up)," he told Arab News. "Most of the Shiite protesters in the street were either left-wing or independent. But, with the unprecedented collapse of the Lebanese pound over the past week, these people are beginning to show their anger. Their salaries, which are paid in the local currency, are no longer sufficient for them for more than a week. Even people who get their paychecks in dollars from Hezbollah have begun to feel the heat."

There has been an increase in theft in Beirut's southern suburbs, Bekaa and the south, according to reports from the Internal Security Forces, as well as an increase in clashes between clans. The uptick in fighting and criminal activity suggests that the reach of Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, which are the de facto authority in these areas, was retreating. The Lebanese pound lost more than 20 percent of its value in 24 hours.

A videotape circulating on social media showed Sheikh Yasser Auda, who is loyal to Hezbollah, berating the party. He said the situation was no longer tolerable and that people were hungry. "If they are still silent, it is because they respect Hezbollah and the Amal Movement until now."

Auda, who deals with jurisprudence and social issues, said that Shiites could no longer tolerate "humiliation" to this degree.

"Where have you taken us?" he demanded to know. "Stop asking us to be patient and stop laughing at our beards. Whoever gets hungry will turn into a thief and drug dealer. How can a person, who has to feed his children, buy medicine for his father, pay the rent or hospital expenses, be patient?"

He called on Hezbollah and the Amal Movement to think about Lebanon. He said they should think about how they integrated themselves into their homeland and respected their people because all sects were hungry, even the Lebanese army. "People are screaming under the table today, but tomorrow they will be screaming over the table, and then how will you respond?"

Activist Ali Al-Amin said that Hezbollah loyalists concealed their pain because, if they raised their voice, they would be accused of treason. "There is a muffled discontent that may appear when the time is right," he told Arab News. "The needs will increase the chaos and congestion, and we do not know how people explode."

Two prominent party loyalists, Anis Al-Naqash and Qassem Kassir, raised the issue of Hezbollah's fate in light of the worsening economic crisis.

Al-Naqash said the collapse of Lebanon would be the end of the resistance, while Kassir asked the party to become independent of Iran, return from Syria where it fought for Iran in defense of President Bashar Assad, and to turn its attention toward Lebanon's domestic chaos.

But Hezbollah loyalists accused Kassir of betrayal, with the campaign against him persisting until he offered an apology.

El-Din said that those who received their salaries in dollars from Hezbollah had begun to feel hostility from neighbors, relatives, and the community. "A social rift has taken place. People criticize them and tell them that the money in their pockets will not buy them anything when the shops close and

'you will starve like us.'

He added that these people did not have excuses to defend themselves. Instead, their flaunting of luxury cars had decreased and they had curtailed their social mobility. "In Tyre, people cannot afford to drive to work. When the neighbor of the rich man gets hungry, he will knock on his door, and when general stability is shaken, it will affect everyone."



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New mobile application gives Palestinians their political match
Panic on the streets as Lebanese pound hits new low

[When black lives don't matter: World silent on Houthi 'Holocaust' of African migrants](#)

Sun, 2021-03-14 01:50

RIYADH: By most accounts, Yemen's Houthi militia just burnt alive nearly 500 African migrants. But where is the outrage among the heavy hitters of human-

rights advocacy or the liberal commentariat? This is no rhetorical question but rather one asked in earnest.

To be sure, selective global outrage is nothing new; it has been around since the birth of the international community and the early days of the human rights movement. But the deafening silence of those who claim the role of international moral arbiters over the latest Houthi outrage is a scandal in itself.

Even by the standards of Houthi disregard for civilian safety, what happened on March 7 in a detention center in Sanaa was despicable. The militia used force to end a strike by migrants who were protesting against cruel treatment, extortion and poor conditions inside the facility, the Geneva-based SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties said on the basis of interviews with some survivors.

Its conclusion left no room for whataboutery by the usual suspects: "The Houthis were directly and consistently responsible for the killing and injury of approximately 450, mostly Ethiopian, migrants in a detention center, on 7 March, 2021, in a fire caused by bombs apparently fired by Houthi forces."



Rights groups say migrants are routinely abused and threatened by Houthi militants, below, and forced to endure squalid conditions. (AFP)

A number of local independent groups have concurred with the finding. Mwatana, a leading Yemeni human rights organization, blamed the Houthis for the fire and accused them of arbitrarily detaining survivors and relatives of the victims in order to stop them from talking about the incident.

"The Ansar Allah (Houthi) group caused the death and injury of scores of African migrants by starting a deadly fire in an overcrowded detention

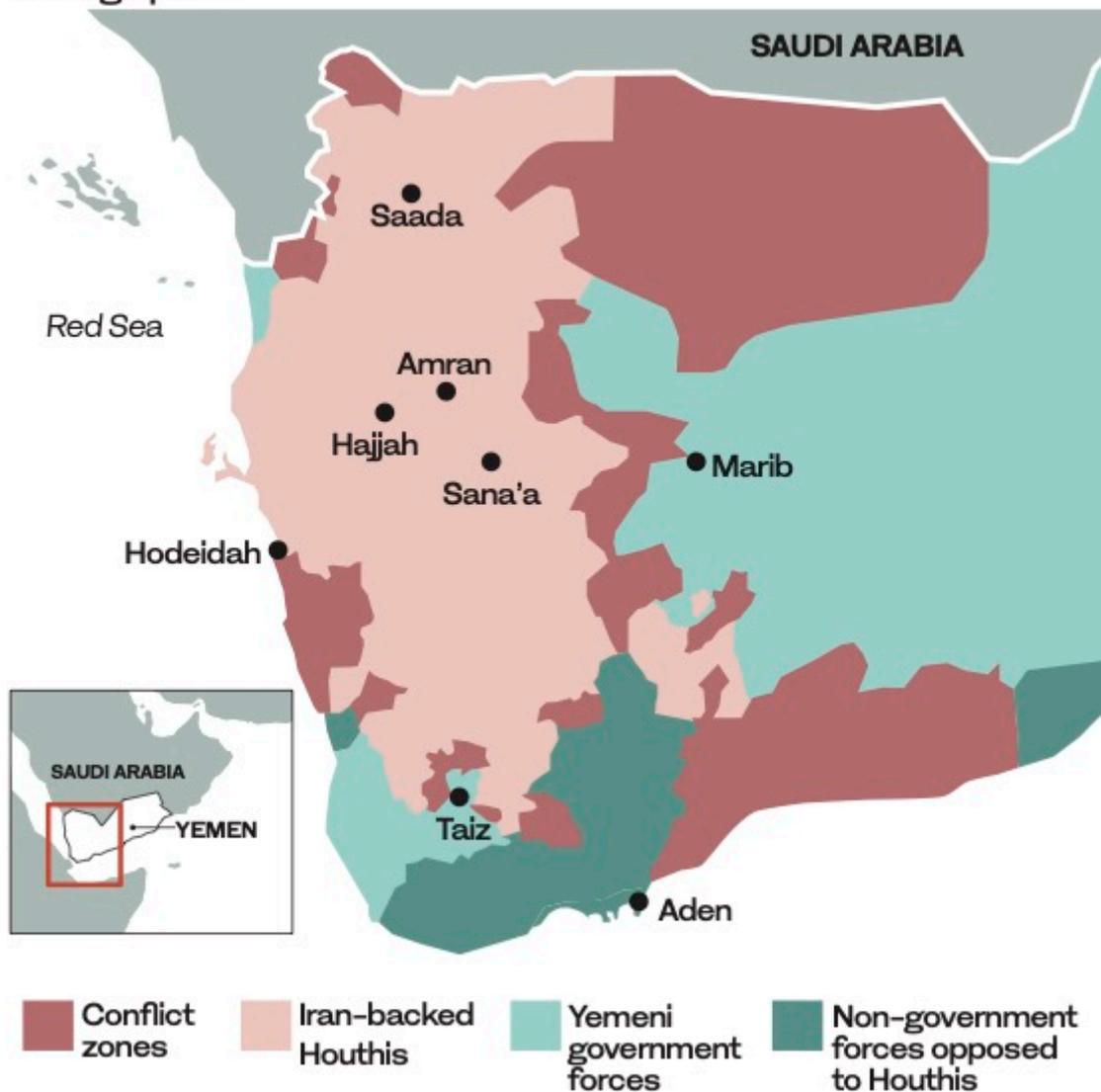
facility in Sanaa on March 7," Mwatana said in a statement.

Separately, Women Solidarity Network accused the Houthis of using live bullets and explosive devices to suppress migrant protests and demanded the UN protect survivors from such intimidation.

"We urge international organizations, including the United Nations, to provide protection to the migrants who have been hospitalized," said the group.

THE HOUTHIS' TERROR HEARTLAND

Control over swathes of Yemen gives the militia a strategic vantage point



SOURCE: SANA'A CENTRE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES, BBC

ARAB NEWS

"Our sources raised the alarm that the Houthis were promising migrants in hospitals the issuance of cards in return for their silence. As per information collected from witnesses, Houthis rounded up illegal African migrants, including children, from their homes to force them into recruitment as fighters to send them to conflict fronts."

Muammar Al-Eryani, information minister of the internationally recognized

Yemeni government, said the Houthis have been intimidating survivors and their families to influence their accounts to the media or any international probe in the future.

Pointing out that that survivors and other witnesses would not give fair testimonies if they remained inside Houthi-controlled areas, he called on the UN migration agency, IOM, to evacuate them to other locations, away from Houthi pressure.

Abdurrahman Barman, a Yemeni human rights advocate and director of the American Center for Justice, said his organization had interviewed some survivors who blamed the Houthis for the tragedy, accusing them of squeezing hundreds of Ethiopians into the detention center which led to overcrowding.



These African migrants in Yemen are lucky enough to receive treatment at a hospital in the southern city of Lahj. Many others are living under “inhumane conditions”. (IOM photo via AFP)

He said the Houthis had prevented monitors of the American Center for Justice from visiting survivors at Sanaa hospitals, adding that survivors’ accounts indicate that the death toll was between 200 and 300.

In a deeply ironic twist, the Sanaa slaughter happened around the same time as the US city of Minneapolis agreed to pay \$27 million to settle a civil lawsuit over the death last year of a single black man, George Floyd, in police custody.

The Minneapolis City Council announced the record settlement – the largest pretrial civil rights settlement ever, described as a powerful message that black lives do matter and police brutality against people of color must end.

“The death of George Floyd ignited an incandescent social movement,” wrote Derrick Johnson, president and CEO of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, in an oped in *The Guardian* in June last year. “In every state and around the world, people of all colors, genders, and ages are coming together to march in fury and in hope, to renounce the past and redeem the future.”

Sadly, if history is any guide “people of all colors, genders and ages” are unlikely to come “together to march in fury and in hope” over the loss of hundreds of Ethiopian lives in Yemen. Never mind that a hashtag #HouthiHolocaust has been trending on Arabic-language Twitter, reflecting the depth of public outrage across the Middle East.



city of Aden in Yemen plead for food and water. (IOM Photo via AFP)

To his credit, Michael Aron, UK’s ambassador to Yemen, has strongly condemned the deaths and called for an immediate and objective probe and unhindered access to the injured migrants.

“Appalled by fire at Houthi-controlled migrant center in Sanaa,” he said on Twitter on Friday. “OHCHR & humanitarian agencies need immediate, unrestricted access to site & those injured. A credible, transparent, independent investigation must be carried out, including a full account of those killed & injured.”

Aron did not quibble over who or what was to blame for the fire and loss of

life. "It is the Houthis inhumane treatment of migrants – including the creation of overcrowded conditions at the center – that led to this terrible loss in human life," he said.

Speaking to Arab News, Badr Al-Qahtani, the Yemen editor of Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper, put the muted outrage of international organizations in the context of Yemen's political realities. Whether it is deaths of migrants or kidnapping of civilians, the problem for the UN and other organizations doing humanitarian work in large swathes of the country is the same: the Houthis' ability to create problems.

"They live in fear of the Houthis because the militia can make their lives more difficult. The tactic works. They deal with the militia with safety as their primary concern," Al-Qahtani said, referring to humanitarian groups.

"With they interact with sovereign governments, such as Saudi Arabia or the UAE, or similar entities, they have a different relationship unlike their approach to the Houthis as they do not have to deal with any threats of violence."

Elaborating on this point, Al-Qahtani said: "International organizations are always careful when dealing with any issues in areas controlled by Houthis in order to achieve their humanitarian goals. Their reactions to the deadly incident in Sanaa are proof of that.



Iran-backed Houthi militia members have been running berserk in Yeme. since the past few years. (AFP file photo)

"Compare this incident with other issues involving some of the same groups

and the UN-recognized Yemeni government. In Aden, for instance, an issue arose concerning migrants from Africa. The same organizations and activists adopted a tough stance against the government and made all kinds of demands.

“The government dealt with these organizations in view of their international stature and reputation, and complied with their demands. These organizations always work with the government and deal with it directly, without any problems or apprehensions.”

By contrast, the Houthis will not hesitate to use strong-arm tactics. “They can delay your papers either at the airport, or transportation or work. Therefore, organizations prefer not to confront them. They may leak some information, but they can’t raise their voice,” Al-Qahtani said.

“You need to realize there is a Houthi body established recently whose purpose is to fully control international organizations. Even foreign governments sometimes take this factor into account. When the British ambassador speaks out openly on a matter, you can be sure about extent of the challenge.”

Barman, of the American Center for Justice, was blunt in his criticism of international organizations as well as the international community for turning a blind eye to the Houthis’ actions.

“This is a heinous crime,” he told Arab News, referring to the deaths in Sanaa. “The world would have made a scene if the burnt migrants were white. And if the perpetrators were not the Houthis, the Security Council would have convened immediately.”



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Migrants demand international probe into deadly Yemen fire at Houthi-run detention center
Houthis accused of starting fire in Sanaa detention center