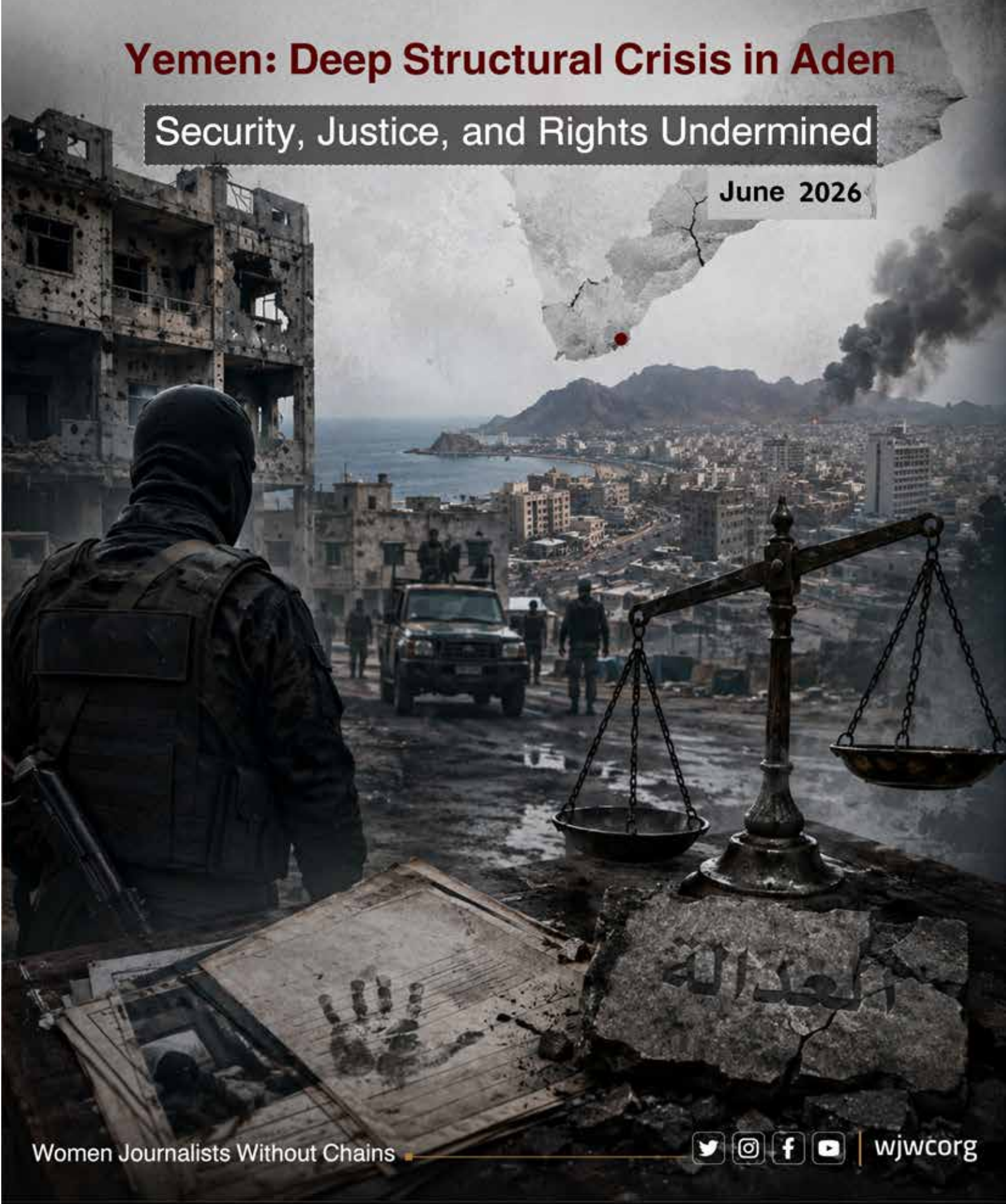
Women Journalists Without Chains

Yemen: Deep Structural Crisis in Aden

Security, Justice, and Rights Undermined

June 2026

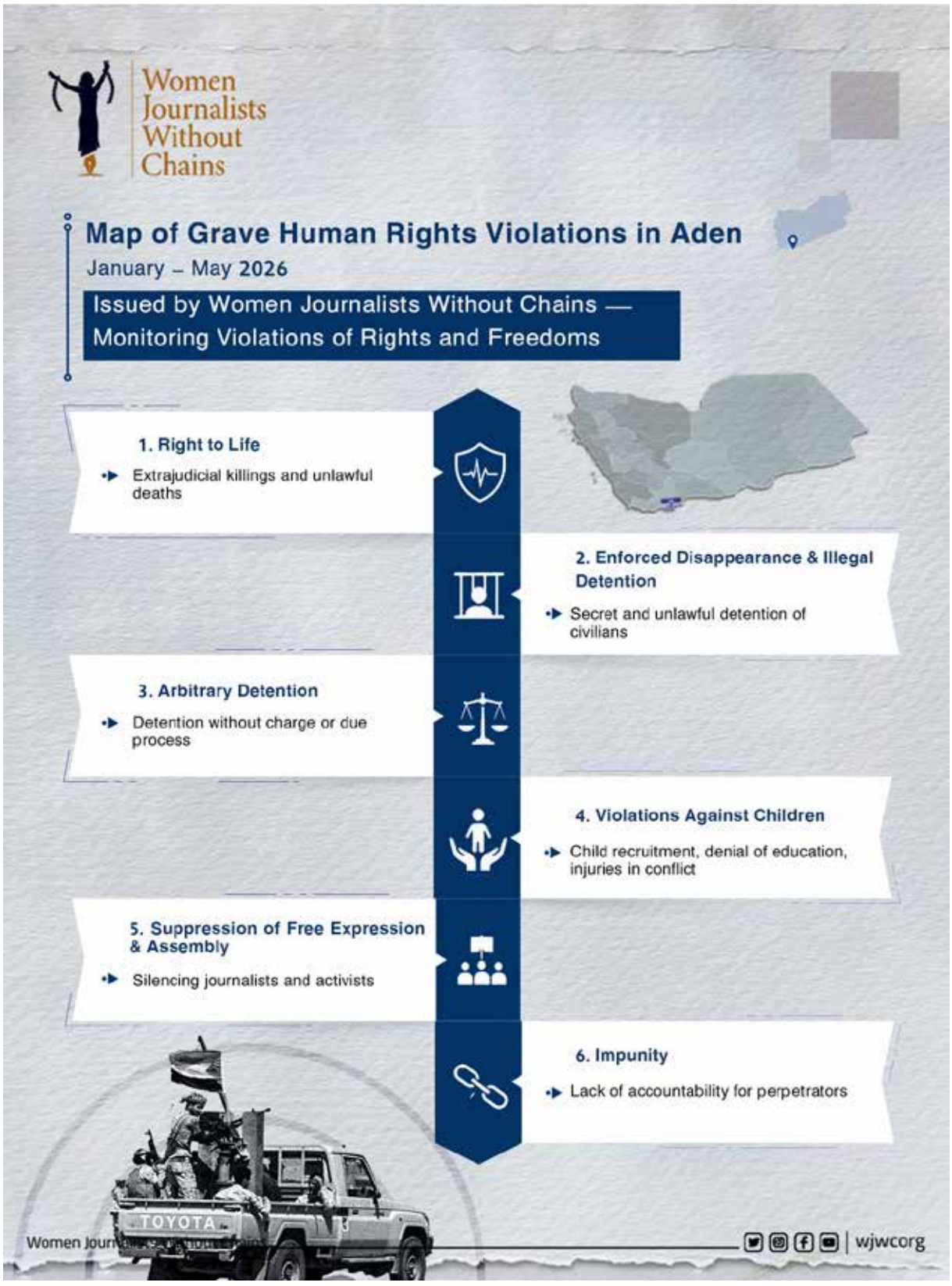


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The city of Aden continues to witness grave and systematic human rights violations that expose a deep structural crisis within the security and justice sectors and reflect a continuing deterioration of the rule of law. Between January and May 2026, field monitoring and documentation conducted by Women Journalists Without Chains identified persistent patterns of organized violence, entrenched impunity, and the continuing inability of state institutions to protect civilians or ensure independent, transparent, and accountable law enforcement.

Documented violations during this period include abduction, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, deaths in custody, extrajudicial killings, escalating targeted assassinations, organized violence, and ongoing restrictions on the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. Serious allegations of sexual abuse against children further highlight the widening range of threats to fundamental rights and freedoms across the city.

These violations reflect a longstanding pattern of institutional dysfunction, compounded by the influence of armed groups operating outside the state's legal and institutional framework. This environment has enabled the recurrence of abuses, weakened legal safeguards, intensified public insecurity, eroded confidence in security and justice institutions, and entrenched a culture of impunity in which perpetrators of serious violations continue to evade accountability.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Map of Grave Human Rights Violations in Aden
January – May 2026
Issued by Women Journalists Without Chains — Monitoring Violations of Rights and Freedoms
1. Right to Life
Extrajudicial killings and unlawful deaths
2. Enforced Disappearance & Illegal Detention
Secret and unlawful detention of civilians
3. Arbitrary Detention
Detention without charge or due process
4. Violations Against Children
Child recruitment, denial of education, injuries in conflict
5. Suppression of Free Expression & Assembly
Silencing journalists and activists
6. Impunity
Lack of accountability for perpetrators
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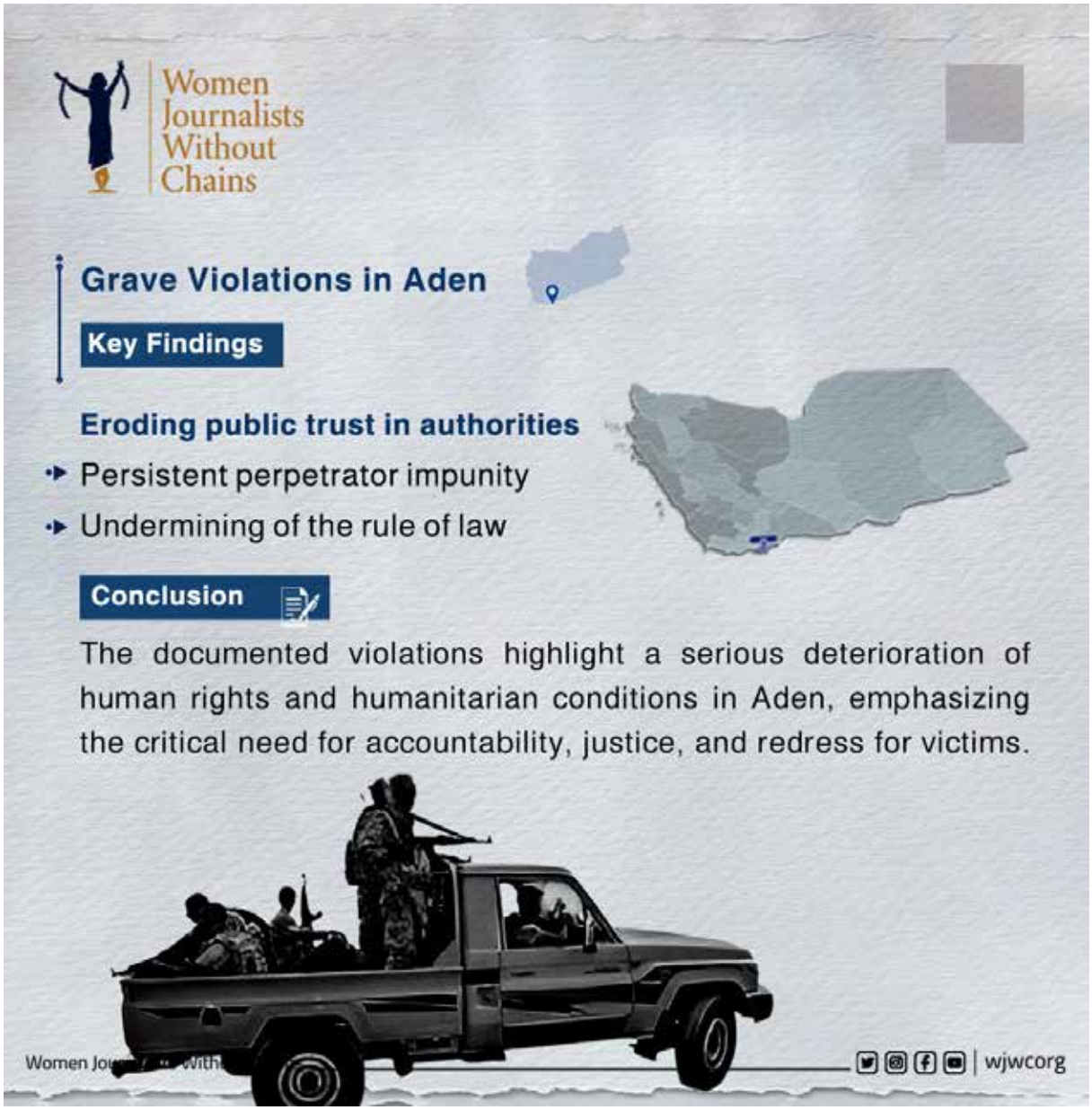


CHAPTER I: VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO LIFE

Aden continues to witness an alarming escalation in violations of the right to life, reflected in patterns of organized violence, targeted assassinations, extrajudicial killings, and deaths in custody. These incidents highlight serious deficiencies within the security, criminal justice, and law enforcement systems and raise growing concerns regarding the ability of state institutions to protect civilians and uphold the rule of law.

The persistence of unlawful killings and other life-threatening abuses—whether resulting from deliberate targeting, excessive or unlawful use of force, or violations committed in places of detention—demonstrates the continued prevalence of

impunity and the erosion of fundamental safeguards for civilian protection.

The right to life imposes both negative and positive obligations on the authorities. In addition to refraining from the arbitrary deprivation of life, authorities are required to take effective preventive measures to protect individuals at risk, conduct prompt, independent, and impartial investigations into all suspicious deaths and serious abuses, and ensure accountability, effective remedies, and guarantees of non-repetition in accordance with international human rights standards.

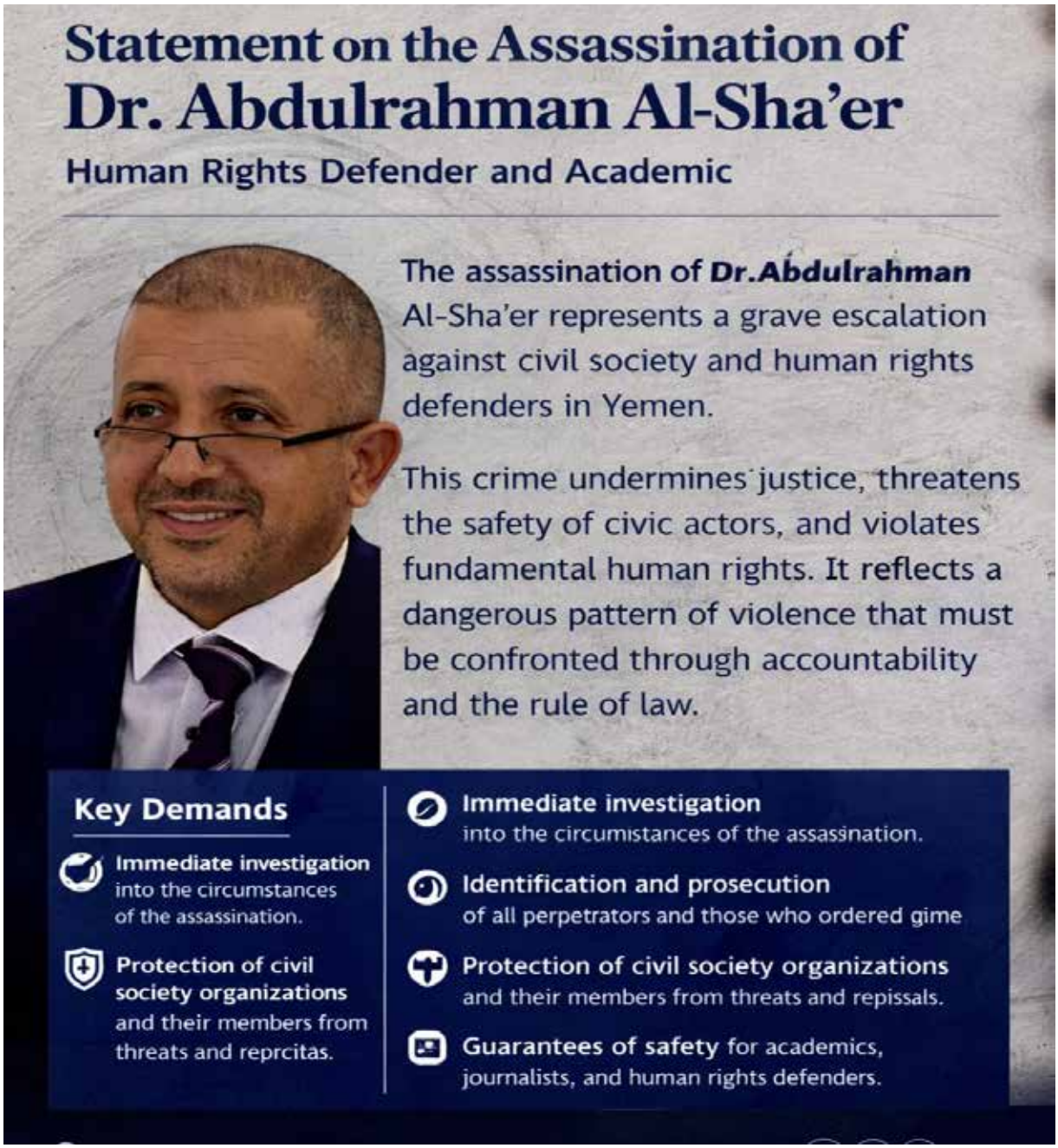
Return of Assassination Crimes and Organized Violence

Recent assassination crimes and organized violence against civilian, developmental, and educational figures in Aden come within a troubling context characterized by weakness in the security protection system and the continuation of impunity as a structural factor exacerbating the likelihood of repeated violations.

The succession of assassination incidents within a close timeframe represents a serious indicator of a fragile security environment that allows the reproduction of patterns of violence directed against civilian actors, amid the absence of an effective deterrence system and weak prevention, investigation, and accountability mechanisms.

- **Case Study: Assassination of Wissam Qa'ed:** Wissam Qa'ed, Acting Executive Director of the Social Fund for Development, was abducted on 3 May 2026 from in front of his home in the Inmaa residential area. He was later found dead in a horrific crime characterized by multiple execution phases, including abduction, unlawful detention, and physical elimination. The nature of the criminal sequence in this case, alongside previous threats linked to the victim's work, raises serious indicators regarding the existence of an organized targeting pattern, and simultaneously reflects clear challenges in the security and preventive response system before the crime occurred.

Case Study: Assassination of Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Sha'er: Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Sha'er, a prominent educator and leader in the Yemeni Islah Party in Aden, was assassinated in the Khabuta neighborhood of Al-Mansoura district on the morning of 25 April 2026. The crime occurred in the vicinity of an educational institution, reflecting the expanding scope of targeting to include civilian figures in public spaces, and indicating increasing erosion of protection guarantees within the city. Security and judicial steps regarding the arrest of a number of suspects in both cases and the initiation of trial proceedings for those involved in the assassination of Abdulrahman Al-Sha'er represent an important development in the course of justice.



However, these measures remain insufficient to stop the pattern of violations or address the roots of impunity. Achieving justice in this case and in the case of Wissam Qa'ed in a transparent and effective manner, in accordance with fair trial guarantees and relevant international standards, represents an essential necessity for restoring community trust in the justice system and ensuring that criminal proceedings do not transform into selective or formalistic treatment. These incidents intersect with a broader record of assassinations witnessed in Aden during past years, which targeted dozens of civilian, community, political, and religious figures, reflecting continued structural imbalances in the security

and justice system and repeated failure to dismantle or sustainably contain environments of violence.

The gravity of this pattern of crimes lies not only in its repetition, but in weak institutional deterrence and the continuation of limited effective accountability, which consolidates an environment conducive to the reproduction of organized violence and undermines community trust in the justice and security system.

Addressing these crimes in isolation from their structural context linked to the multiplicity of armed power centers and weak law enforcement limits the ability to understand their complex nature and obstructs any serious efforts to prevent their recurrence or dismantle the environments producing them.

The continuation of assassination crimes and organized violence without independent, effective investigations and genuine judicial accountability — including previous crimes that targeted dozens of civilians — constitutes a direct threat to civil peace and the rule of law, undermines public trust in the justice and security system, and consolidates a dangerous pattern of impunity.

B. Extrajudicial Killings and Excessive Use of Force

The continued use of lethal force during security operations remains deeply troubling. While states have a legitimate duty to maintain public order, this authority carries strict limits under international human rights law. Every use of force must respect the right to life, and must satisfy the core principles of necessity, proportionality, and precaution.

In April 2026, two men lost their lives during security operations reportedly aimed at apprehending wanted individuals. Marwan Al-Alimi was killed in the Al-Mimdara area of Sheikh Othman district, and Saber Abu Ali died in Dar Saad district. The circumstances surrounding both deaths raise serious questions. Did the security forces involved exhaust all non-lethal options? Did they act in accordance with legal safeguards governing arrest and the use of force? The conflicting accounts that have emerged make it impossible to answer these questions without an independent investigation.

These cases demand more than internal reviews. They require transparent, impartial inquiries that establish the facts, assess whether international standards were breached, and determine whether unlawful killings took place. Without such accountability, the cycle of violence will continue — and trust in the institutions meant to protect civilians will erode further.

In February 2026, demonstrators gathered outside Ma'ashiq Palace in Aden. Many were affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council and sought to approach the presidential compound. Security forces responded with force to disperse the crowd. One person was killed. Several others were injured.

The right to peaceful assembly is not absolute, but it is fundamental. The use of lethal force against protesters is permissible only in the most extreme circumstances — specifically, when there is an imminent threat to life that cannot be addressed through lesser means. Attempting to approach a protected site, or participating in a demonstration, does not meet this threshold.

When deaths or serious injuries occur during law enforcement operations, the state bears a clear obligation: conduct prompt, independent, and impartial investigations. These must examine whether the force used was necessary and proportionate, identify who is responsible when violations occur, and ensure victims receive effective remedies. Crucially, they must also produce concrete measures to prevent the same tragedy from happening again.

C. Abduction, Torture, and Death in Custody

The death of citizen Abdulrahman Ahmed Abduljalil Al-Alimi during arbitrary detention in Aden in March 2026 brought to the forefront documented practices whose pattern has been linked during past years to security and military formations affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council (announced dissolved). These formations assumed management or supervision of detention facilities outside legal frameworks within an

extended record of violations that included abduction, enforced disappearance, torture, and management of illegal prisons, including notorious secret detention facilities established, supported, supervised, and managed in contexts linked to Emirati support for these formations.

Al-Alimi, 33 years old, a father of five children from Taiz governorate, arrived in Aden in late March 2026 to assist a relative in shop renovation works, before contact with him was cut off following his departure from the Sheikh Othman area toward Khormaksar. According to information circulated by his family and human rights sources, he was detained by National Security forces (formerly the Security Belt) in Sector Eight of Sheikh Othman, before being transferred to Al-Sawlaban Camp prison under the same authority, where he died during detention.

The handover of the victim's body to his family with visible signs of injuries and grave torture, alongside the circulation of video footage showing the deterioration of his health condition inside the place of detention, constitutes serious indicators and evidence of his exposure to ill-treatment and torture inside facilities belonging to the same authority, incurring direct responsibility on National Security forces for his safety from the moment of his detention until his death.

Denial or recharacterization of the causes of death by the detaining authority does not absolve it of full legal responsibility, as it bears an absolute obligation to guarantee the right to life and freedom from torture, and to subject all cases of death during detention to independent, transparent criminal investigation, including neutral forensic autopsy and precise determination of the responsibility trajectory.

This case cannot be separated from a broader pattern of violations attributed to National Security forces (formerly the Security Belt) and its leadership, which include abduction, arbitrary detention, torture, and death during detention, foremost among them the case of political activist Anis Al-Jardami in 2025, who was subjected to abduction, enforced disappearance, torture, and neglect before dying during detention.

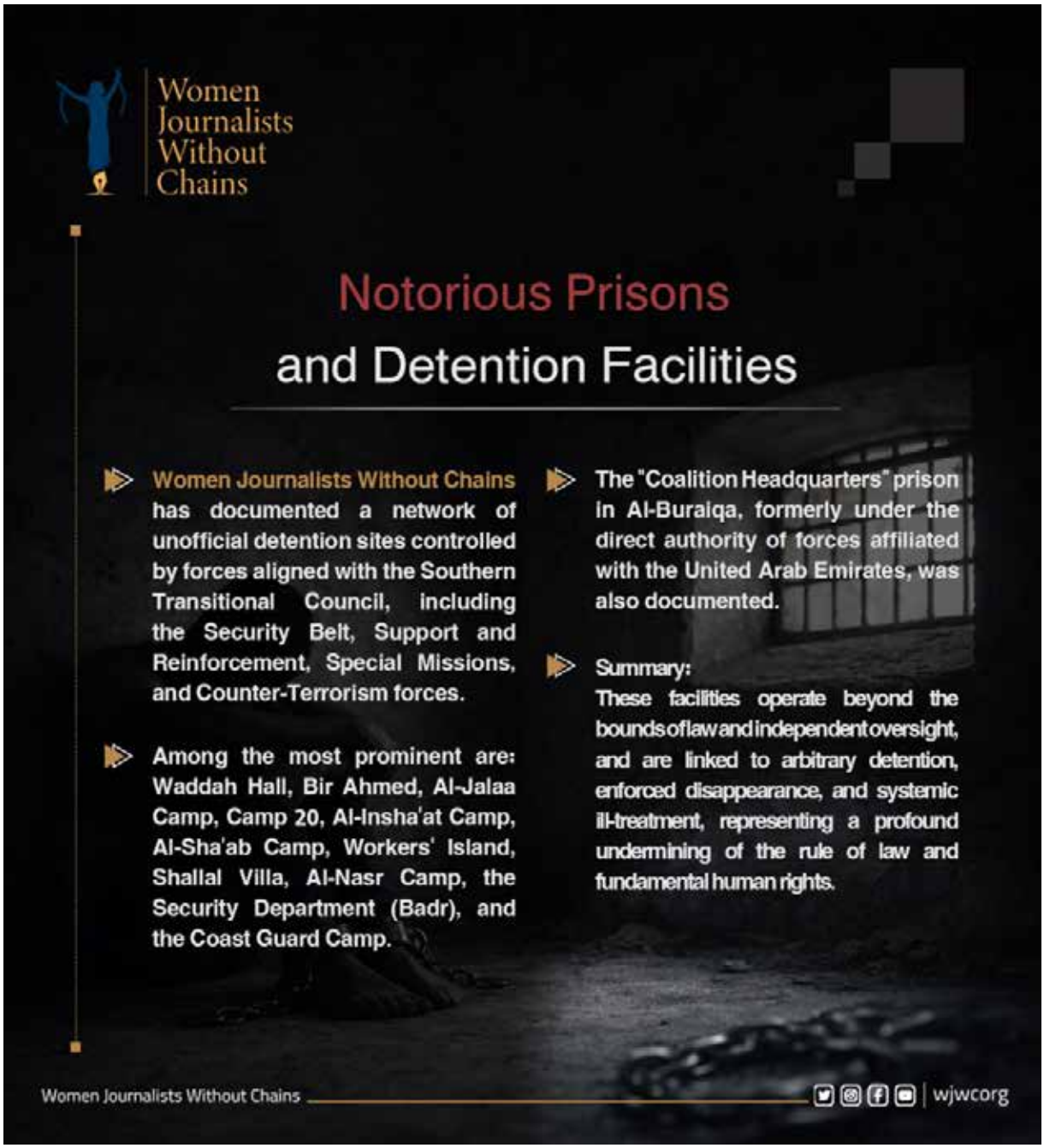
The right to life during detention imposes a direct obligation on judicial and prosecutorial authorities to open independent, effective investigations into any death inside places of detention, to uncover its circumstances and hold all direct and indirect responsible parties accountable, with emphasis on the responsibility of National Security forces (formerly the Security Belt) as the detaining authority.

CHAPTER II: ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE AND ILLEGAL PRISONS

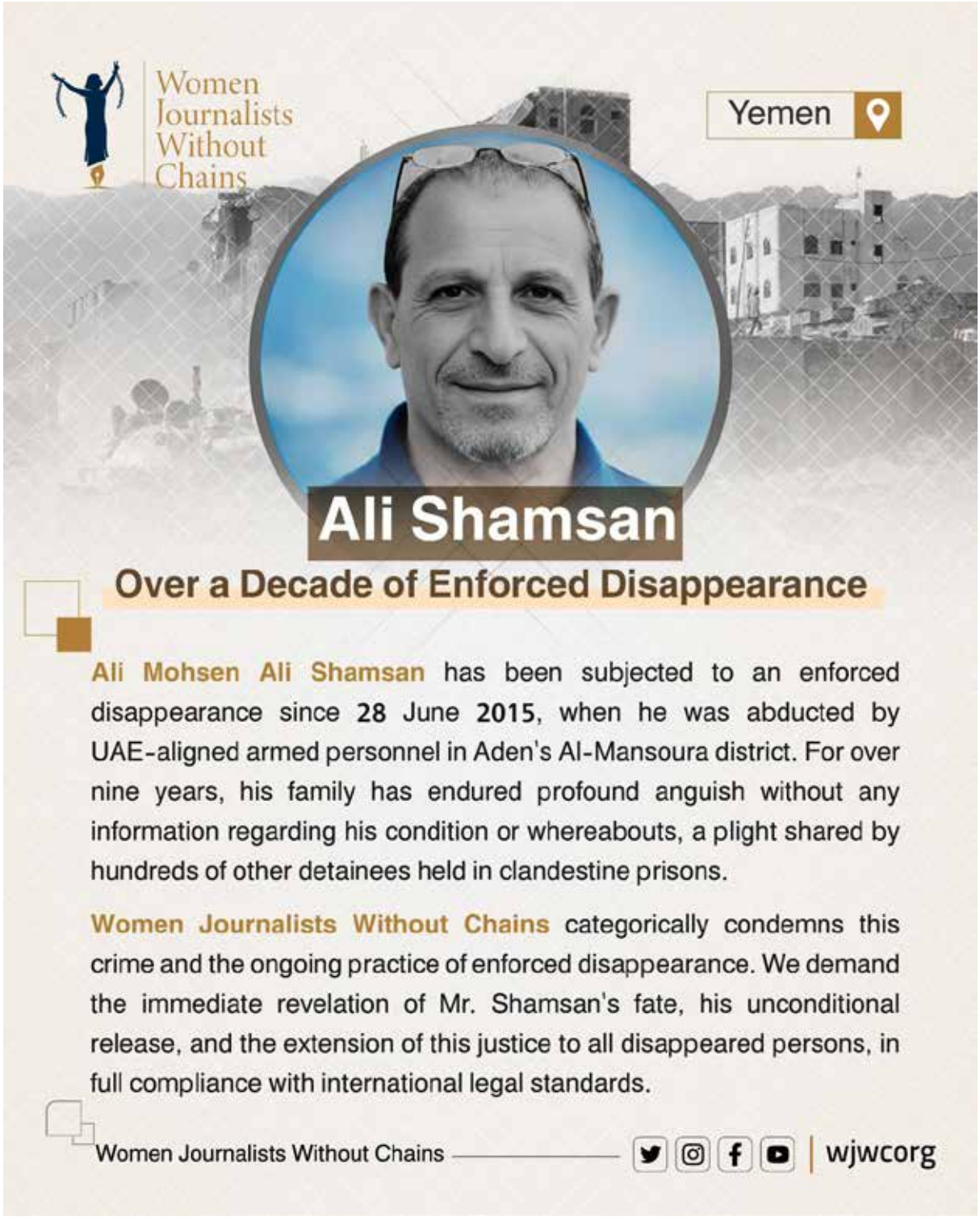
For more than a decade, enforced disappearance and illegal detention have remained among the most dangerous unresolved human rights issues in Aden. Nearly five months have passed since President Dr. Rashad Al-Alimi, head of the Presidential Leadership Council, issued directives ordering the closure of illegal prisons and the release of all detainees held outside legal frameworks. Yet there has been no visible, transparent progress. This delay raises serious questions about whether there is any genuine political will to end impunity for these violations — or whether the state intends to address them at all.

Those directives, issued at the beginning of this year, could have laid the groundwork for resolving one of the most complex human rights files in the country. Instead, they have stalled. No clear implementation plan has been made public. The fate of forcibly disappeared persons remains unknown. The illegal detention system has not been dismantled. What should have been a turning point has instead become another symbol of stagnation — and of the gap between official promises and actual practice when it comes to transitional justice.

The uncertainty is devastating. Dozens of detainees and disappeared persons remain unaccounted for in secret prisons that were established and expanded over recent years by security and military formations linked to the Southern Transitional Council and supported by the United Arab Emirates. Their families do not know where they are being held. They do not know whether any official body has inspected these facilities. They have received no information about investigations, reviews, or even whether their loved ones are still alive. This silence deepens the suffering of families who have already endured years of anguish — and it erodes whatever trust remains in the authorities' willingness to fulfill their legal and constitutional obligations.



The harm extends far beyond the victims themselves. Families have spent years trapped in a cycle of anxiety and uncertainty, denied the fundamental right to know the truth. Many have lost their breadwinner, plunging households into economic crisis. The psychological and social toll is immense: children growing up without fathers, mothers struggling to maintain hope, communities fractured by fear. In this sense, the families are victims too — their suffering a direct extension of the original violation.



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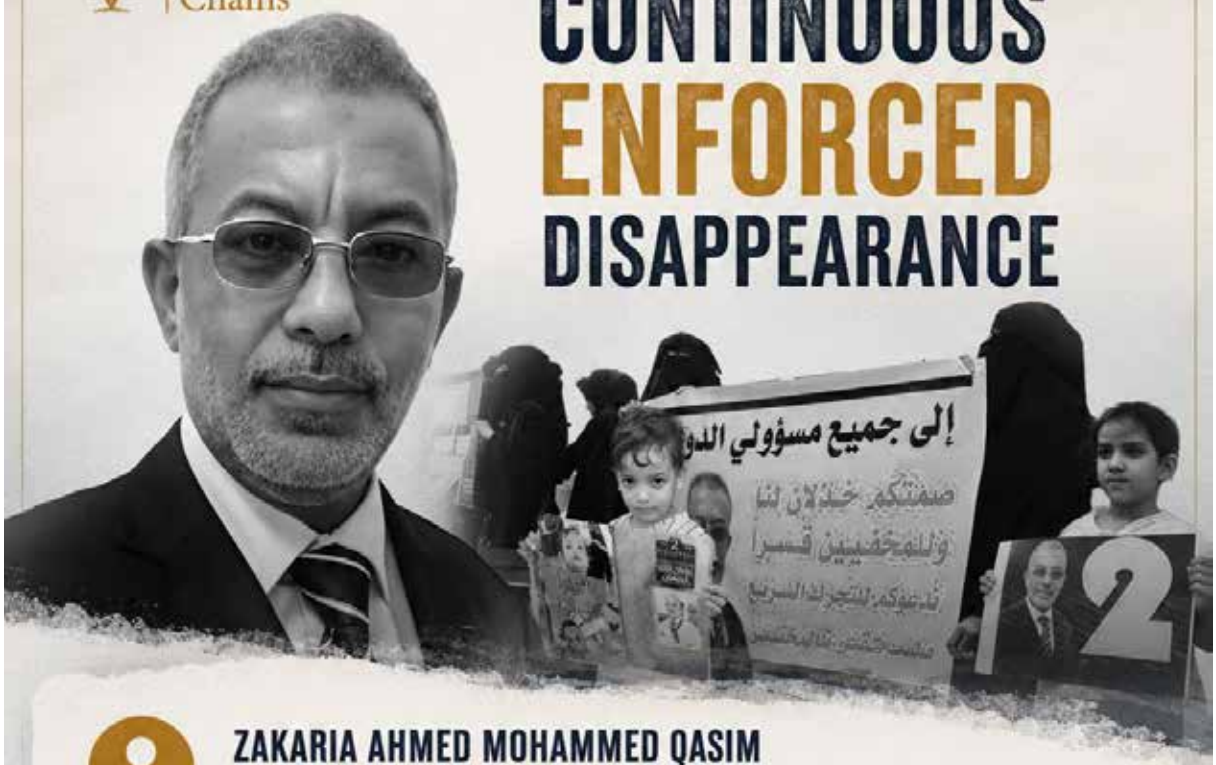
CONTINUOUS ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE



ZAKARIA AHMED MOHAMMED QASIM

- Disappeared since 2018
- On 27 January 2018, at dawn, educator and social activist Zakaria Qasim (aged 65) was abducted in front of his home in Al-Mualla, Aden.
- The perpetrators were armed men affiliated with former Aden police chief Shalal Shaye, as part of a campaign targeting activists in the city.
- Despite the passing years and growing concerns about his health, his family remains deprived of any knowledge of his fate or the ability to visit him.

OUR POSITION

Women Journalists Without Chains condemns this ongoing crime and demands:

- **Immediate disclosure** of Zakaria Qasim's fate.
- **Release** of all forcibly disappeared persons.
- **Accountability** for those responsible for these violations.

> "No journalist should disappear for speaking the truth."

Women Journalists Without Chains

Mohammed Sheikh Fadhl Haitham

Five Years of Enforced Disappearance

A social activist and community figure whose voice for justice and people's rights has been silenced since May 2021.

FIVE YEARS OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE

- Disappeared since 26 May 2021.
- Abducted in Aden by Southern Transitional Council forces while returning to his home in Al-Shaab city.
- Taken to an unknown location, with his fate still concealed.
- His family has endured five years of silence, deprived of any information about his health or legal status.
- In 2024, his father passed away after years of fruitless searching for his son.

BACKGROUND

- Mohammed Sheikh Fadhl Haitham is a social activist and community figure.
- He was abducted after calling for a peaceful gathering demanding salaries and improved electricity and water services.
- He previously chaired a committee advocating for the release of abductees and succeeded in securing the freedom of several detainees.

OUR POSITION

Women Journalists Without Chains condemns his ongoing enforced disappearance and demands:

- Immediate disclosure of his fate.
- Release of Mohammed Sheikh Fadhl Haitham and all disappeared persons.
- Accountability for those responsible for these violations.

His disappearance is not just a crime against him, but a violation of justice, humanity, and dignity.

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There is also a risk that any future closure or "reorganization" of these facilities will be merely cosmetic. Without truth, accountability, and guarantees that the

system will not simply reappear under a different name, administrative measures will mean little. Rebranding illegal prisons does not deliver justice to those who disappeared inside them.

Treating enforced disappearance as a security matter to be managed through political negotiation or administrative containment — rather than as a grave human rights violation requiring legal accountability and redress — only deepens the climate of impunity. It signals that those responsible will not face consequences. It tells victims and their families that their rights are negotiable. And it undermines any credible effort to rebuild public trust in state institutions or the rule of law.

A genuine resolution of this file demands a clear and transparent roadmap: full disclosure of the fate of every disappeared person; unrestricted access for the Public Prosecution and judiciary to all detention facilities, without exception; independent and effective investigations into every violation linked to illegal prisons; and an absolute commitment that evidence will not be concealed, that perpetrators will be held accountable, and that victims and their families will finally receive truth, justice, and redress.

CHAPTER III: ARBITRARY DETENTION AND VIOLATIONS LINKED TO LAW ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES

Arbitrary detention remains a persistent and troubling feature of Aden's security landscape. Over the past five months, documented cases reveal a continuing pattern: individuals held without legal basis, denied basic rights, and subjected to detention procedures that fall far short of both domestic law and international standards. These practices point to deeper dysfunctions within the security apparatus — weak judicial oversight, inconsistent adherence to legal procedures, and a culture of impunity that allows violations to recur unchecked.

The documented incidents share common features. Detainees are frequently denied the right to know why they have been arrested. They are cut off from their families and lawyers. They do not appear before the Public Prosecution within the timeframes required by law. These are not isolated administrative failures. They represent a recurring pattern of abuse — one that suggests some security forces view arrest and detention powers as discretionary tools rather than authorities bound by strict legal limits.

i. Case Study: Dr. Najib Al-Khamysee and His Son

On May3, 2026, Dr. Najib Mohammed Saleh Al-Khamysee, a professor in the French Language Department at Aden University's College of Arts, and his son Munir Najib Mohammed Saleh, an engineer, were taken from their home in the Khabuta area of Al-Mansoura district. The raid was conducted by police from Dar Saad district — a jurisdiction that does not cover the area where the family lives.

This raises immediate questions. What legal basis justified police from one district entering another to conduct an arrest? Was there a judicial warrant? Was the operation coordinated with local authorities? None of this has been made clear.

The family was not told what charges, if any, had been brought against Dr. Al-Khumaisi or his son. They were unable to confirm their legal status. According to the family, release directives were issued — yet the two men remained in detention. The gap between an official order for release and its actual implementation is not a bureaucratic delay. It is a failure of the rule of law itself.

Case Study: Photographer Sohaib Al-Hatami

On 2 April 2026, photographer and journalist Sohaib Al-Hatami was stopped at a checkpoint operated by "National Security" forces — formerly known as the Security Belt — in Aden. What followed was not a routine security check. He was detained for hours. His personal belongings were confiscated. His electronic devices were searched, their contents examined. He was threatened. And before he was released, he was forced to sign a pledge promising never to enter the city again.

These actions violate multiple rights in a single incident: the right to freedom of movement, the right to practice journalism, the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to privacy. A journalist should not be detained, searched, and effectively banished from a city for doing his job. Yet this is what happened — and the absence of any apparent legal basis for these actions suggests they were carried out with the confidence that no accountability would follow.

ii. Arbitrary Detention and Justice Obstruction: The Case of Journalist Nasih Shaker

The case of journalist Nasih Shaker illustrates what happens when arbitrary detention meets outright obstruction of judicial authority.

Mr. Shaker was arrested on 19 November 2023 at the Immigration and Passports building in Aden, where he had gone to complete travel procedures for a training course in Beirut. He was not charged at the time of arrest. He was not brought before a judge. Instead, he disappeared.

For more than a year, his family did not know where he was. Repeated inquiries were met with denial. It later emerged that he had been held at “Liwa Al-Nasr” camp, a facility belonging to Security Belt forces, before being transferred to Bir Ahmed prison. The enforced disappearance itself was a grave violation. But what followed was equally disturbing.

On 20 January 2026, a court issued a final judgment ordering Mr. Shaker’s immediate release. The court determined that the time he had already spent in detention was sufficient. The Public Prosecution issued directives to implement the decision. Yet the judgment has not been executed. Months later, he remains in Bir Ahmed prison.

The charges against him — using his journalistic position, publishing false news, incitement, harming national interest — fit a familiar pattern. Across Aden and Yemen more broadly, journalists face criminal prosecution for their work. The charges are often vague, the procedures irregular, and the fair trial guarantees inadequate. In Mr. Shaker’s case, the prosecution appears to have been referred to a specialized appellate criminal prosecution, a context in which concerns about procedural fairness and the influence of non-judicial considerations are particularly acute.

The continued detention of a journalist despite a final court order for his release is not merely a failure of enforcement. It is a direct challenge to the authority of the judiciary and to the principle that no one is above the law. It reveals a structural gap between the justice system as it exists on paper and as it functions in practice. And it sends a chilling message: that journalism can be punished, that court orders can be ignored, and that those who hold power need not answer for either.

Women Journalists Without Chains
Two Years of Enforced Disappearance
Nasih Shaker
Disappeared since 19 November 2023
Abducted in Aden by Southern Transitional Council forces upon his arrival in the city, while en route to Beirut to attend a training course.
A freelance journalist, detained solely for his professional activities.
Deprived of any contact with his family or lawyer since the day of his abduction.
Women Journalists Without Chains condemns his continued detention and enforced disappearance, and demands:
Immediate and unconditional release of Nasih Shaker.
Guarantees of his safety and well-being.
Respect for press freedom and the right of journalists to work without fear or reprisals.

iii. Systemic Patterns

These cases, though involving different individuals, different locations, and different security forces, point to a common reality. Arrest and detention powers are being exercised without adequate legal restraint. Judicial oversight is weak or absent. Police stations, checkpoints, and detention facilities operate with limited accountability. The result is a system in which legal guarantees for detainees exist in theory but are routinely violated in practice.

The consequences extend beyond the individuals directly affected. Every unlawful detention, every ignored court order, every instance of coercion at a checkpoint erodes public confidence in the rule of law. When citizens cannot trust that arrest will be lawful, that detention will be justified, or that court judgments will be enforced, the social contract between state and citizen frays. Restoring that trust requires more than policy statements. It requires structural reform: clear protocols for arrest, mandatory judicial review, strict time limits on pre-charge detention, and — above all — consequences for those who violate these standards.

CHAPTER IV: Grave Violations Against Children

The sexual abuse of a child in Aden, and the video footage that circulated afterward, sent shockwaves through the community. The outrage was immediate and justified. But this incident is more than a single crime. It is a warning sign — an indicator of how fragile child protection systems have become, and how vulnerable children are when those systems fail.

Allegations of this nature demand an urgent, independent, and transparent investigation. The truth must be established in full. And every person involved — those who committed the abuse, those who filmed it, those who shared it, and anyone who tried to cover it up — must be held accountable.

i. The Nature of the Violation

Sexual assault against a child is not only a crime. It is a profound violation of human dignity, protected under Yemen's Constitution, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and international human rights law. When such abuse is documented on video — whether for distribution, extortion, or coercion — the harm is compounded. The child is victimized twice: first by the assault itself,

then by the permanent, circulating record of their abuse. Every person who participated in creating, sharing, or using that material must face strict criminal liability.

ii. A Pattern, Not an Isolated Incident

This case cannot be examined in isolation. It intersects with broader indicators of systemic failure: weak child protection mechanisms, the exploitation of influence or official position within security institutions, and persistent reports that previous complaints of a similar nature were ignored or mishandled. Any investigation must therefore expand its scope. It must examine not only what happened in this specific incident, but whether this represents a recurring pattern — whether organized practices of abuse have developed in environments where accountability is weak and influence is unchecked.

There are indications that other children may have suffered similar violations, or were pressured into silence. This possibility must be treated with the utmost seriousness. Investigators must distinguish between individual incidents and systematic practices. They must ask: Was this an isolated crime, or does it reflect an organized method of exploitation enabled by power and protected by silence?

iii. Obstruction of Justice

Disturbing information has emerged regarding the handling of this case. One suspect was reportedly arrested in connection with earlier related reports, then released without completing investigations or referring the matter to the competent prosecution. Allegations have also surfaced that the victim's family was pressured — under threat — to submit a waiver of their legal rights.

Grave Violations Against Children

Protecting children is a binding legal and moral duty that admits no delay

01 Fragile Protection Systems & Targeting Children

- Rapid shifts in social media and digital spaces have reshaped the landscape of child protection.
- Exploitation of online platforms exposes children to serious risks and assaults on their dignity.
- Weak and fragmented protection mechanisms result in partial, inadequate responses.

Grave Violations Against Children

Protecting children is a binding legal and moral duty that admits no delay

02 Risks of Documentation & Circulation

- Recording or filming violations — whether by perpetrators or victims — stigmatizes children and inflicts lasting psychological and social harm.
- Circulating images or videos multiplies the damage and constitutes an additional violation.
- Such materials must be handled with utmost caution, confidentiality, and respect for investigative integrity.

Grave Violations Against Children

Protecting children is a binding legal and moral duty that admits no delay

03 Path to Justice & Accountability

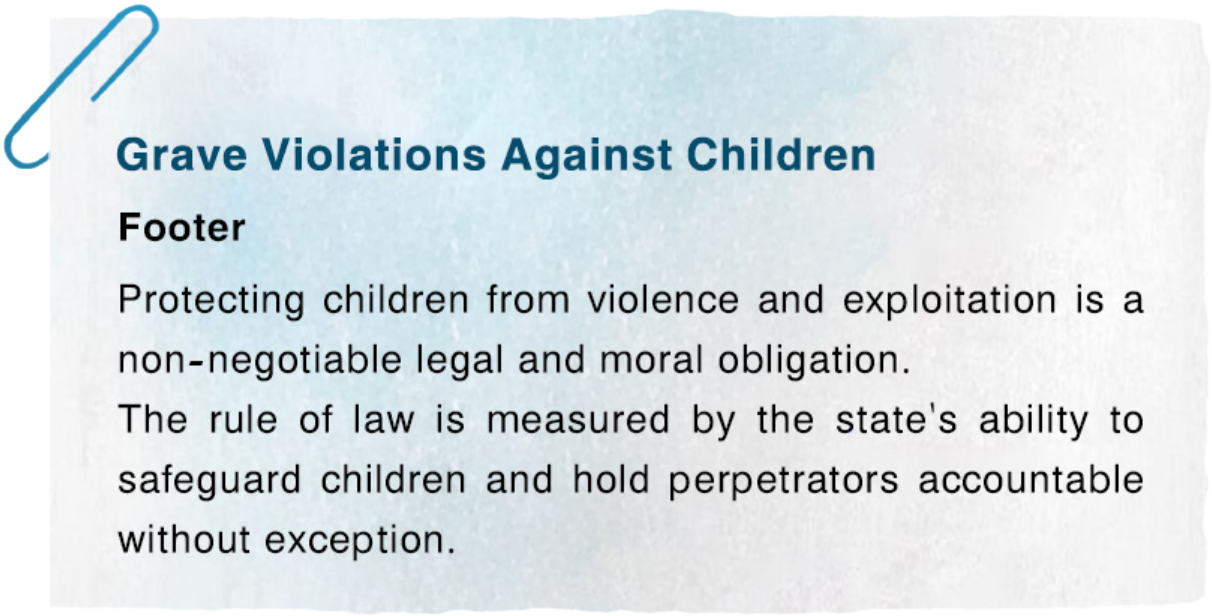
- Independent, transparent investigations must address all circumstances without exception.
- Multi-disciplinary teams are essential to secure justice and accountability.
- Every perpetrator must face legal and social responsibility, regardless of status or position.
- Impunity cannot be tolerated.

Grave Violations Against Children

Protecting children is a binding legal and moral duty that admits no delay

04 Protection & Recovery Mechanisms

- Establish safe, confidential channels for reporting violence and exploitation.
- Provide psychological and social support to affected children.
- Implement rehabilitation and reintegration programs.
- Raise community awareness of children's rights and methods of protection.



If confirmed, these actions represent serious institutional failure, illegitimate interference, and active obstruction of justice. They suggest that influence was used not to protect the victim, but to protect the accused. And they reveal a system in which justice can be diverted by pressure, intimidation, and the exploitation of power imbalances.

iv. Delayed Response, Systemic Weakness

The arrest warrants and travel bans that were eventually issued came only after the case exploded in public opinion. This timing raises serious concerns. Why did authorities not act when the incident was first reported? Why did intervention require community outrage and media pressure?

If the abuse occurred earlier than the official response suggests, critical evidence may have been lost. The victim may have been left without protection for an extended period. Opportunities for effective accountability may have narrowed. Delayed action in cases of child sexual abuse is not merely inefficient — it is dangerous. It allows perpetrators to escape, evidence to degrade, and victims to remain exposed to further harm.

Protection must be grounded in legal duty, not public relations. Violations must be treated as crimes requiring immediate intervention — not as incidents to be managed once they attract enough attention.

v. What Justice Requires

Initial procedural steps are insufficient. What is needed is a professional, independent, and transparent investigation that examines all evidence, hears from all concerned parties without exception, and prioritizes the protection of victims and the integrity of the process.

Specifically, the Public Prosecutor and competent judicial authorities should:

- **Form an independent, multidisciplinary investigation team** comprising experts in child protection, forensic medicine, digital crimes, and psychological and social support;
- **Verify all allegations**, examine all circulated materials, and hear from victims and witnesses in safe environments that center the child's best interest;
- **Establish safe, confidential reporting mechanisms** that enable victims, families, and witnesses to come forward without fear of retaliation or stigma;
- **Guarantee medical, psychological, and legal care** for victims, and protect them from any threat or intimidation;
- **Develop the reporting and investigation system** to enable early detection of recurring patterns, ensuring that fear and stigma do not become barriers to justice.

vi. The Harm of Circulation

The continued circulation and republication of video footage related to this incident constitutes a separate and ongoing violation. Every share, every view, every republication deepens the victim's trauma. It violates their privacy and dignity. It exposes them and their family to further stigma and social harm. And it actively undermines the course of justice — compromising investigation proceedings, evidence integrity, witness protection, and the confidentiality of criminal procedures.

Those who circulate such material are not neutral observers. They are participants in the harm.

The protection of children from violence and exploitation is an indivisible legal and moral obligation. The credibility of the rule of law is measured by the state's capacity to hold every perpetrator, every negligent official, and every person

who covered up these crimes accountable — without exception, regardless of position or status. No one should escape punishment. And no child should be left to suffer in silence because the institutions meant to protect them failed to act.

CHAPTER V: SUPPRESSION OF FREEDOM OF OPINION, EXPRESSION, AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Violations against life and personal liberty do not exist in isolation. They are inseparable from the restrictions imposed on freedom of opinion, expression, and peaceful assembly. These freedoms are not abstract rights — they are the essential tools communities use to expose abuses, demand truth, and pursue justice. When they are suppressed, the path to accountability is blocked.

Field monitoring by Women Journalists Without Chains during the first five months of 2026 documented a continuing pattern of restrictions on human rights and humanitarian activities in Aden. These restrictions raise serious and growing concerns about the extent to which fundamental rights — guaranteed by both the Yemeni Constitution and international law — are being respected in practice.

i. The Attack on Families in Al-Orudh Square

On the evening of 9 March 2026, a group of families gathered in Al-Orudh Square, Khormaksar district. They were mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers of men who had been abducted or forcibly disappeared — some for years — in prisons run by security formations linked to the Southern Transitional Council, and in facilities associated with the United Arab Emirates' presence in Aden. The families came to hold a peaceful protest. Their demand was simple: tell us where our children are.

Security forces dispersed the gathering by force. Participants — including women — were assaulted. The photographs and banners they carried were torn apart.

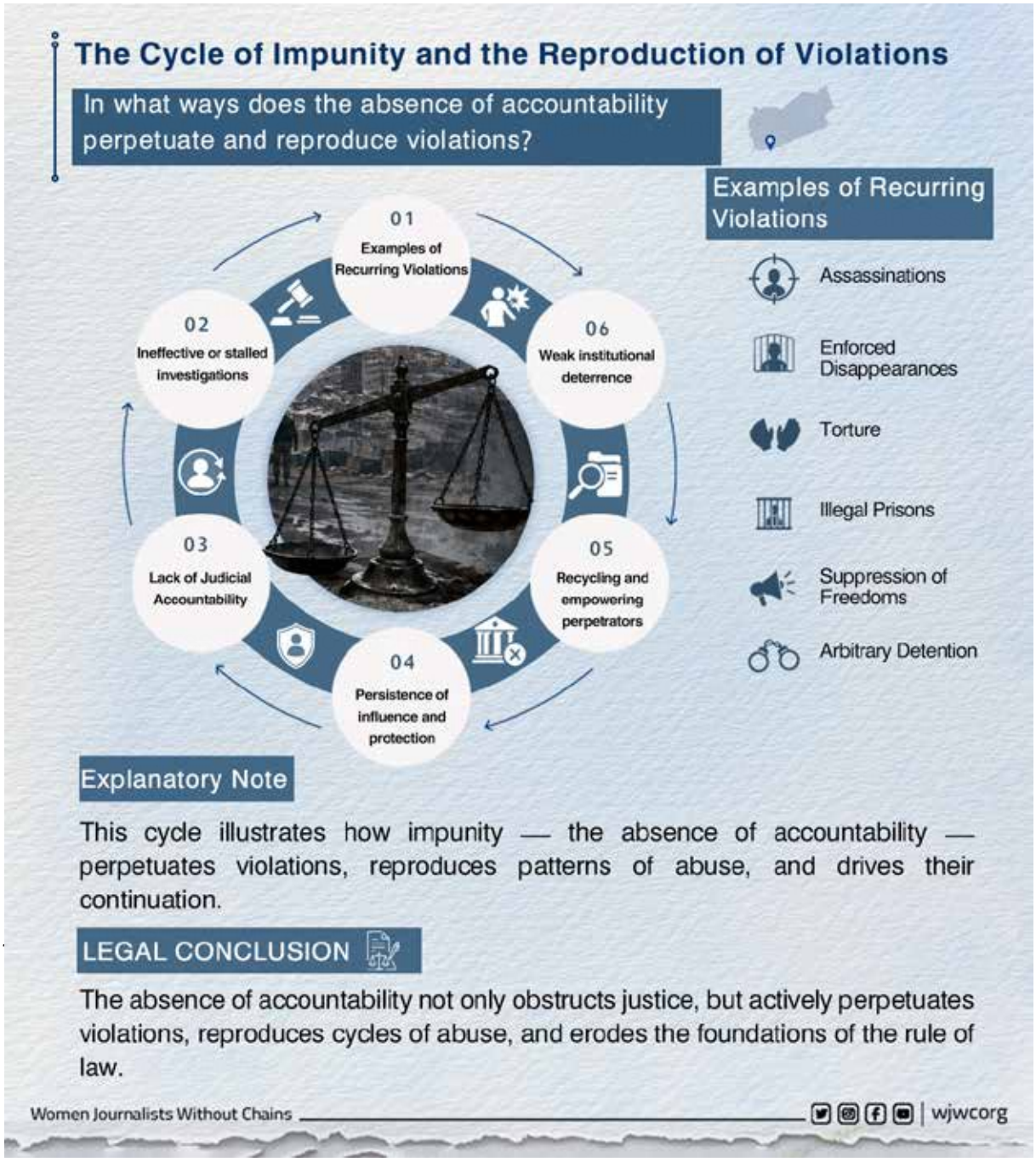
The gravity of this incident extends far beyond the prevention of a single protest. These were not political activists. They were families who have spent years searching for disappeared sons, living in anguish, denied even the most basic human need: to know whether their children are alive or dead. The assault on them was an assault on their grief. It deepened their suffering. And it sent a chilling message: not only will the state not help you find your children — it will punish you for asking.

This is not an isolated event. The continued restriction on the activities of families of the disappeared is an extension of the enforced disappearance crisis itself. The violation does not end with the abduction and concealment of the victim. It reaches into the lives of their families, denying them the right to seek truth, demand redress, and pursue accountability through peaceful and legal means.

ii. Why These Rights Matter

Freedom of expression and peaceful assembly take on heightened importance during periods of transition and institutional rebuilding. They are the mechanisms through which victims and civil society monitor the performance of authorities,

expose failures, and push for reform and justice. When these freedoms are illegitimately restricted, public trust in state institutions erodes. And the opportunity to address accumulated violations seriously — rather than manage them through silence and force — is lost.



The continued appointment or reintegration of security leaders with documented records of abuse — without independent judicial investigation or rigorous human rights vetting — violates Yemen's obligations under international human rights law. It also strikes at the heart of the principle that no one is above accountability.

Case Study: Imam Al-Nubi

Imam Al-Nubi has reportedly been re-empowered within security formations in Aden. This is deeply concerning. His name has been linked in human rights and media reports to extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, torture, abduction, the illegal seizure of public and private property, and the exploitation of security influence outside institutional frameworks during his leadership of Camp 20 — a Security Belt facility in Crater district.

The message this sends is unmistakable: political and security connections remain sufficient to override justice. Victims and their families are left to watch the very figures accused of their suffering return to positions of authority — with no transparent judicial process, no explanation, and no redress.

i. The Assassination of Amjad Abdulrahman

The case of activist and journalist Amjad Abdulrahman illustrates the lethal consequences of this impunity.

Before his death, Mr. Abdulrahman had been subjected to sustained threats and

incitement campaigns related to his civilian activism, including his participation in peaceful protests against the demolition of a historic mosque in Aden. He was subsequently detained and tortured inside Camp 20 — then under Imam Al-Nubi's leadership. The targeting was systematic, and it was linked directly to his public expression and civic engagement.

On 14 May 2017, Mr. Abdulrahman was shot dead in a public place. The killing bore clear signs of premeditation: prior threats, prior detention, and execution in broad daylight. What followed was equally disturbing. Armed elements reportedly attempted to seize his body and prevent burial and funeral prayers. A coordinated incitement campaign stigmatized him with ideological accusations, including charges of atheism — fueling violence against him even after his death.

The circle of targeting did not close with his assassination. Colleagues, activists, and journalists who attended to offer condolences were themselves subjected to arbitrary detention, torture, and ill-treatment inside Camp 20. The violation expanded from one victim to his entire social and professional network.

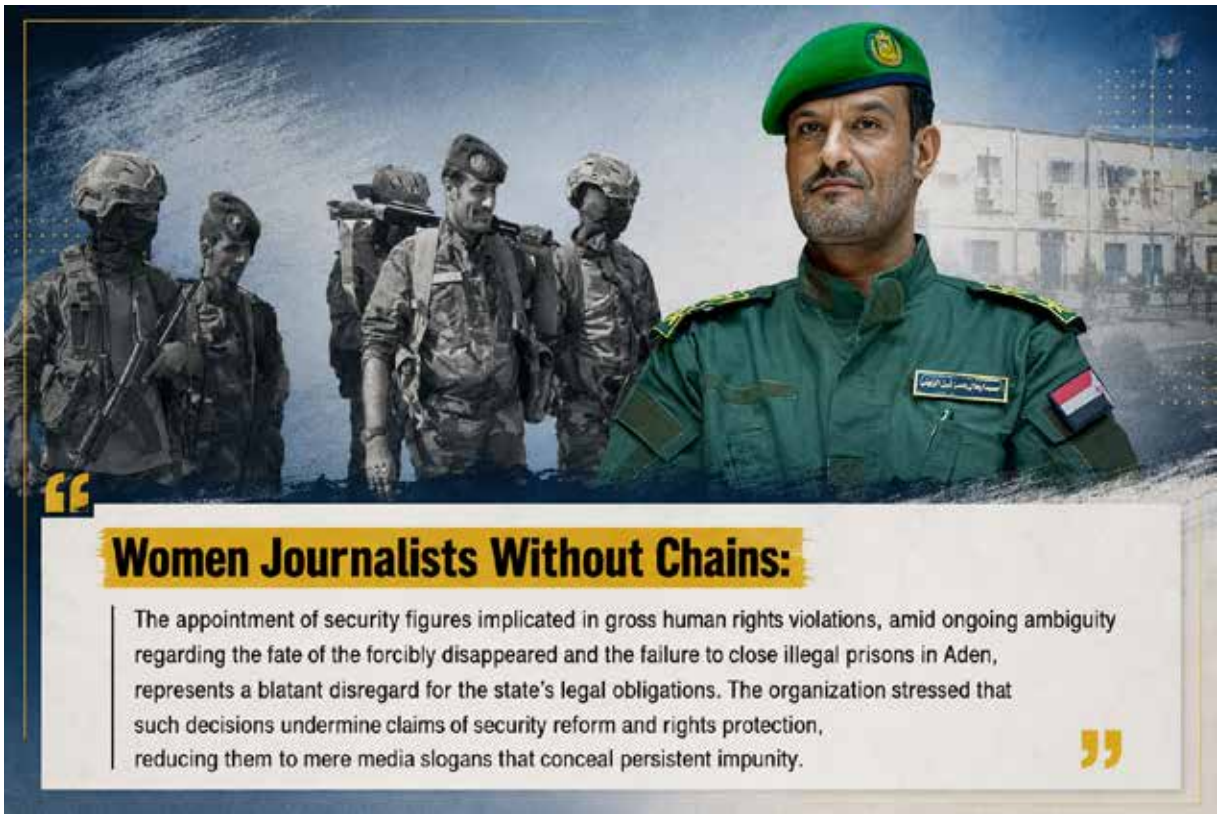
Taken together, these incidents reveal a systematic pattern: extrajudicial killing, arbitrary detention, torture, organized intimidation of human rights defenders and journalists, obstruction of burial rites, and posthumous defamation of the victim. No serious investigation has been opened into any of these incidents. The impunity is complete. And it is lethal.

ii. Case Study: Jalal Al-Rabaie

Jalal Al-Rabaie has also been reappointed to security leadership positions, despite human rights documentation linking him to grave and systematic violations: killing, abduction, enforced disappearance, systematic torture, suppression of peaceful assembly, and the management of illegal detention facilities beyond any effective judicial oversight.

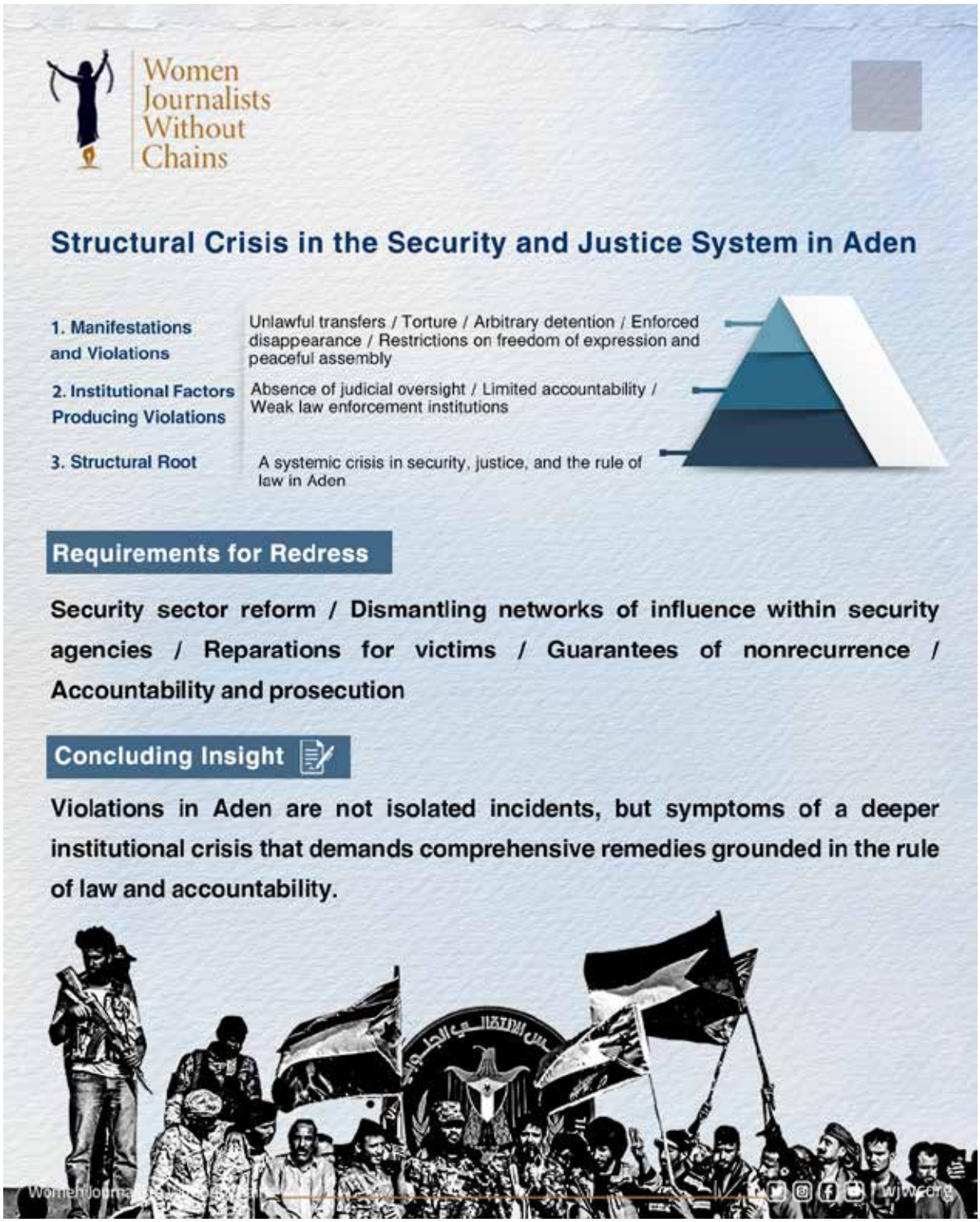
His name is tied to the case of political activist Anis Al-Jardami in 2025 — a case that involved abduction, enforced disappearance, torture, and medical neglect leading to death in detention.

The obstruction of accountability in such cases is not a bureaucratic failure. It is a deliberate pattern. And it directly denies victims and their families their right to justice, redress, and reparation.



The Structural Crisis

No process of state institution rebuilding or security sector reform can be credible while figures accused of grave violations are returned to power without legal accountability. This practice undermines the foundations of transitional justice. It destroys public trust. And it signals that the rule of law applies to some, but not to those with the right connections.



Respect for human rights is not achieved through political speeches or formalistic security arrangements. It is achieved through a single, non-negotiable principle: no person escapes accountability, regardless of position, influence, or affiliation. Every perpetrator of grave violations must be subject to independent investigation consistent with international standards.

The repetition of violations, the re-empowerment of those accused of committing

them, the weakness of accountability mechanisms, and the persistence of multiple competing security and military power centers — these are not isolated problems. They are symptoms of a deeper institutional and structural crisis that transcends individual incidents and demands systemic reform.

CHAPTER VII: A STRUCTURAL CRISIS THREATENING THE RULE OF LAW

The violations documented in Aden between January and May 2026 — killings and assassinations, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, restrictions on public freedoms, and the entrenched impunity that shields perpetrators — do not amount to a collection of isolated incidents. They reveal something far more disturbing: a deep structural crisis that has crippled the security and justice system and hollowed out the rule of law.

This crisis transcends individual cases. It is the product of accumulated institutional imbalances that have weakened the state's capacity to protect rights, enforce the law, and guarantee equal treatment before it.

i. A Legacy of Violence

What Aden faces today is the inheritance of years of grave and organized violations. Security and military formations affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council, supported by the United Arab Emirates, have operated across the city with wide latitude. The violations committed during those years — and the impunity that followed — were not aberrations. They became the template.

The state's announced efforts since January 2026 to enhance security, protect rights, and extend institutional authority are proceeding in this shadow. State-building in Aden is not a blank-page exercise. It requires dismantling the legacies of previous phases: the informal networks of influence, the parallel security structures, and the patterns of violence and impunity that have become embedded in the system. Rebuilding the security and justice apparatus is necessarily gradual. But it cannot be an excuse for delay.

ii. The Security Sector: Reform or Recycling?

Any credible effort to rebuild the security system must begin with a clear principle: those linked to grave violations cannot be recycled into positions of power without independent investigation and legal accountability. The re-empowerment of figures such as Imam Al-Nubi and Jalal Al-Rabaie — documented in the

preceding chapter — directly contradicts this principle. It reproduces the same structures that produced the violations.

Restructuring security and military leadership is not optional. It is a state obligation. And it must include rigorous vetting, transparent appointment processes, and the exclusion of individuals against whom credible allegations of grave human rights abuses have been raised, pending independent judicial review.

iii. The Collapse of Judicial Protection

The weakness of the judicial and legal system is not a secondary problem. It is central to the crisis. Its effects are not limited to slow procedures or limited investigations — though these are serious. The deeper damage is institutional: the judiciary lacks the capacity and independence to enforce the law in cases involving grave violations. This failure radiates outward, eroding protection for the most fundamental rights: the right to life, physical safety, and fair trial guarantees.

When courts issue release orders that are ignored, when prosecutors cannot access illegal detention facilities, when investigations into killings are not opened — the message is clear. The law exists, but it does not apply to everyone. And it does not protect those who need it most.

iv. State Responsibility

The Yemeni authorities bear direct legal responsibility for protecting civilians, preventing crimes, uncovering the fate of forcibly disappeared persons, conducting independent and transparent investigations into all violations, and ensuring accountability for all involved parties — without exception.

This responsibility is not diminished by the complexity of the operating environment. It is not suspended by political transition, security restructuring, or the reorganization of armed formations. Political and administrative changes, however necessary, do not absolve the state of legal responsibility for violations committed in previous periods. They do not terminate obligations related to truth, accountability, and reparation.

Treating violations as discrete incidents — addressing this killing, that detention, this protest — without confronting the institutional architecture that produces them, ensures only one outcome: the same violations will recur, in different

forms, against different victims.

v. The Role of the International Community

The international community has a critical role in supporting Yemeni efforts to strengthen the rule of law, reform the justice and security system, and establish independent accountability mechanisms. This includes supporting investigations into any external support, empowerment, or influence that contributed — directly or indirectly — to the occurrence or continuation of violations.

Accountability cannot be purely domestic if domestic institutions have been compromised. International engagement, including through the UN Human Rights Council, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and relevant special procedures, remains essential to closing the impunity gap.

vi. Conclusion

Addressing the human rights situation in Aden requires a comprehensive approach rooted in the rule of law, accountability, and non-selectivity. Partial or piecemeal measures — one investigation here, one release order there, one administrative reshuffle elsewhere — separated from institutional reform will not suffice. They will merely shift the patterns of violation without dismantling the structures that produce them.

Sustainable stability in Aden depends on something more fundamental: the demonstrable commitment of the state and its international partners to protect civilians, enforce the law equally, and ensure that no one — regardless of position, affiliation, or political utility — escapes accountability for grave crimes.

CHAPTER VIII: LEGAL CHARACTERIZATION OF DOCUMENTED VIOLATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OCCURRENCE

The incidents documented in this report are not random abuses. They form identifiable patterns of grave human rights violations that strike at the core of rights guaranteed under the Yemeni Constitution, national legislation, and international human rights law.

These include:

- **The right to life**, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

- **The right to liberty and security of person**;
- **The prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment**;
- **The right to a fair trial**;
- **Children's rights**; and
- **Freedom of opinion, expression, and peaceful assembly**.

Certain documented violations — enforced disappearance, torture, illegal detention, deaths in custody, and extrajudicial killing — do not merely breach international human rights law. Given their recurring, organized, and continuous nature, they rise to the level of **crimes against humanity**.

This characterization carries profound legal consequences. It triggers individual and institutional responsibility. It demands independent, impartial, and effective investigations conducted in accordance with international standards. And it requires accountability for every person involved — not only those who directly committed the acts, but also those who ordered, planned, facilitated, or covered them up, and those who possessed the authority to prevent or investigate them and failed to do so.

Institutional Failure and State Responsibility

The continuation and repetition of these violations does not occur in a vacuum. It occurs in a context defined by weak accountability, the absence of effective redress, and the re-empowerment of figures surrounded by credible allegations of grave abuses. This is not incidental. It is systemic.

It reflects an institutional failure by the state and its authorities to fulfill their legal obligations to respect, protect, and implement human rights. When the same violations recur, when the same perpetrators return to power, when judicial orders are ignored and investigations are not opened, the state is not merely failing to act. It is actively undermining the guarantee of non-repetition and the rule of law itself.

This failure demands more than isolated corrective measures. It requires comprehensive structural reform of the security and justice systems — reform consistent with UN principles on accountability, combating impunity, and guarantees of non-repetition. Anything less will perpetuate the same violations, against new victims, in new forms, under the same shield of impunity.

CHAPTER IX: CALL FOR ACCOUNTABILITY, REFORM, AND THE RULE OF LAW

The violations documented in this report are not isolated events. They form an accumulated pattern of grave abuses affecting the right to life, personal liberty, physical safety, freedom of opinion and expression, peaceful assembly, and children's rights. They occur in a security and judicial environment defined by deep structural imbalances, entrenched impunity, and the persistent failure to hold multiple security and military authorities accountable.

Addressing this reality demands more than partial measures or reactive responses. It requires a comprehensive, unambiguous commitment to truth, accountability, and reparation — and a firm guarantee that the same violations will not be reproduced under any form or justification. Restoring public trust in state institutions and the rule of law means ending the logic of exception. It means ensuring that every authority and every individual is subject to full legal and judicial oversight, without discrimination or selectivity.

Call for Accountability, Reform, and the Rule of Law

A human rights reading of structural violations and pathways to ending impunity in Aden.

02 Analytical Framework of the Problem

Institutional Crisis

The crisis stems from a fundamentally dysfunctional institutional framework, not isolated incidents.

Systemic Production

Continuous reproduction of violations under various institutional umbrellas

Competing Power Centers

Collapse of the rule of law and unchecked proliferation of competing power centers

Erosion of Trust

Systemic erosion of public trust in state institutions.

Call for Accountability, Reform, and the Rule of Law

A human rights reading of structural violations and pathways to ending impunity in Aden.

03 Governing Principles for a Resolution

Universal Accountability

Comprehensive, non-discriminatory accountability without exception

Victim-Centered Approach

Prioritizing truth-seeking and victim reparations as an absolute baseline.

Ending Exceptionalism

Eradicating the culture of legal and political exceptionalism.

Judicial Oversight

Subjecting all security and military entities to strict legal oversight.

Sectoral Overhaul

Executing sweeping institutional reform across the security and justice sectors.

Call for Accountability, Reform, and the Rule of Law

A human rights reading of structural violations and pathways to ending impunity in Aden.

04 Key Strategic Recommendations

01 Independent Investigations

Launch transparent, rigorous investigations into all documented violations.

02 Dismantling Secret Prisons

Close all clandestine detention facilities and disclose the fate of the forcibly disappeared

03 Enforcing Judgments

Execute standing judicial rulings and court orders swiftly and without delay

04 Witness Protection

Establish robust protection mechanisms for victims, witnesses, and journalists

05 Safeguarding Civic Freedoms

Guarantee and protect the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

06 Vetting Officials

Permanently bar and prevent the reinstatement of individuals implicated in human rights abuses

07 Security Sector Reform

Overhaul the security apparatus to subject all forces to civilian legal frameworks

08 Activating Redress Mechanisms

Operationalize holistic reparations, fair compensation, and guarantees of non-repetition

09 International Advocacy

Mobilize the international community to support accountability and institutional reform efforts

Call for Accountability, Reform, and the Rule of Law

A human rights reading of structural violations and pathways to ending impunity in Aden.

05 Executive Human Rights Summary

Political Will

Institutional reform cannot be achieved without clear, uncompromised political and judicial will.

Impact of Impunity

The continuation of systemic impunity directly deepens and entrenches the structural crisis

Binding Commitments

Safeguarding human rights in Aden is a binding legal and moral obligation that cannot be deferred

The Path to Justice

True justice begins with formal acknowledgment, followed by accountability, redress, and verified guarantees of non-repetition.

Human Rights Conclusion

"Any genuine resolution to the crisis of human rights violations must begin with unconditional acknowledgment. This baseline must be followed by holding perpetrators accountable, providing comprehensive redress to victims, and establishing absolute guarantees of non-repetition."

We therefore call for the following:

First: Independent Investigations

Open independent, transparent, and effective investigations into all violations documented in this report — including assassinations, extrajudicial killings, deaths in custody, abduction, enforced disappearance, torture, and assaults on children. These investigations must establish individual and institutional responsibility, and must result in the prosecution of all involved parties without exception.

Second: Close Illegal Prisons and Free the Disappeared

Close all illegal and secret prisons and detention centers immediately. Disclose the fate of every forcibly disappeared person. Release all arbitrarily detained individuals, all those held outside legal frameworks, and all those detained through procedures tainted with invalidity.

Enable the Public Prosecution and judicial authorities to exercise full jurisdiction over every detention and enforcement facility without exception. Ensure the complete and final evacuation of all unlawful detention. And hold perpetrators accountable under national law and relevant international standards.

Third: Enforce Judicial Orders

Implement all judicial judgments ordering release immediately and unconditionally. End all practices that obstruct or circumvent court decisions. The failure to enforce a court order is not an administrative delay — it is a direct assault on the rule of law and judicial independence.

Fourth: Protect Victims and Defenders

Provide effective protection for victims, their families, witnesses, human rights defenders, and journalists. Prevent all threats, intimidation, and retaliation against them. Establish safe, confidential channels for reporting violations — particularly those affecting children, women, and detainees.

Fifth: Guarantee Freedom of Expression and Assembly

End all restrictions on freedom of opinion, expression, and peaceful assembly. Guarantee the right of families, victims, and activists to express their demands, to

protest peacefully, and to seek truth, justice, and redress — without suppression, assault, or persecution.

Sixth: Stop Recycling Abusers

Do not re-empower or recycle any individual surrounded by serious or documented allegations of grave violations unless and until they have been subjected to independent, transparent judicial investigation. Do not appoint any leader or individual to a security position without prior vetting of their human rights record. Security positions must never become instruments for reproducing impunity.

Seventh: Reform the Security and Judicial Sectors

Launch a serious institutional reform process for the security and judicial sectors. Dismantle informal networks of influence. Subject all security and military formations to unified legal command and effective judicial oversight. Prevent the duplication of jurisdictions and the proliferation of power centers operating outside the state.

Eighth: Provide Reparation

Activate comprehensive reparation measures for victims and their families — including truth disclosure, redress, compensation, rehabilitation, and guarantees of non-repetition. These are not optional gestures. They are foundational pillars of any genuine human rights response.

Ninth: International Support

We call upon the international community to support institutional reform efforts in Yemen, to strengthen the rule of law and independent accountability mechanisms, and to support all investigation and review processes related to grave violations. No party — regardless of position or affiliation — should escape responsibility.

CONCLUSION

The path forward is clear. It requires explicit political will and judicial courage. It demands practical, measurable procedures — not vague statements, not formalistic arrangements, not promises that vanish once public attention fades.

Yet Aden today faces the opposite reality. Violations continue without accountability. Perpetrators are empowered instead of investigated. Justice

is obstructed instead of served. These are not isolated failures; they are interconnected forces that reproduce the same crisis, expand its reach, and leave civilians exposed to an environment that neither safeguards their rights nor protects their dignity.

The protection of rights and freedoms in Aden is not a political choice subject to negotiation or delay. It is a **legal obligation**, a **moral imperative**, and it is **nonnegotiable**.

Any genuine resolution must begin with full recognition of what has occurred — every killing, every disappearance, every act of torture, every silenced protest, every assault on a child. From that recognition, three obligations follow without exception:

- **Accountability** — Hold perpetrators responsible before the law.
- **Reparation** — Redress victims and their families with truth, compensation, and rehabilitation.
- **Guarantees of NonRepetition** — Ensure these violations will never be repeated under any form or justification.

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