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## Clashes in Al-Jawf as 9th Brigade takes up positions in Hamdan

Amal Al-Yarisi

**SANA'A, July 16**—At least seven people were killed in clashes that broke out late Tuesday between the Houthis and military units backed by pro-government tribesmen in the Al-Safra area of Al-Jawf, northeast of Sana'a.

Abdulhameed Amer, head of the Islah Party office in Al-Jawf, said that the Houthis attacked military locations in Al-Safra and Al-Hajr, in addition to the strategic Al-Saleh Fort overlooking Al-Safra. Islah and the Houthis are strongly opposed to each other and relations between the two groups often turn violent.

Amer said that the Houthis are trying to regain control of Al-Safra after they were driven out by soldiers from the Maeen Military Camp and Popular Committees

early last month in clashes that left several casualties on both sides.

The Houthis gained control of Al-Safra and the Al-Saleh Fort during the 2011 uprising against the regime of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh but later relinquished them.

"The tribesmen will not allow them to control these locations again because the Houthis used to loot the supplies of the military and block the road," said Amer.

Sheikh Mohammed Salem Bin Abood Al-Sharif, governor of Al-Jawf, called on Defense Minister Mohammed Nasser and Brigadier Mohammed Al-Haweri, the commander of the 6th Military Command, to send troops to end the conflict in Al-Jawf.

Mohammed Al-Bukhaiti, spokesperson for the Houthis, told the Yemen Times that militias of the

Islah Party are stationed in Al-Safra Military Camp, adding that the Houthis would not allow these militias to control locations that are supposed to be controlled by the military.

"These militias attack Houthi locations through Al-Safra. The Houthis are the majority in Al-Jawf," he added.

Amer denied that Islah members are involved in the fighting.

The clashes in Al-Jawf follow protracted fighting in Amran governorate and the Hamdan and Bani Matar districts of Sana'a governorate, where the Houthis recently seized key military locations including the headquarters of the 310th Armored Brigade.

The 9th Brigade, which is stationed in Houthi-controlled Sa'ada and is seen by the Houthis as a more neutral force, on Sunday de-

ployed troops in the area around Al-Dhain Mountain in Hamdan.

Amer Al-Marani, a leading Houthi figure in Amran, told the Yemen Times that assigning the 9th Brigade to Al-Dhain Mountain will help bring an end to clashes because the brigade is not politically affiliated.

A committee headed by Nasser and Al-Haweri visited Hamdan on Monday. The committee assigned Brigadier Ali Al-Thafif, commander of the 9th Brigade, to supervise all military locations in the area including Al-Dhain Mountain, which overlooks Sana'a International Airport.

President Hadi on Monday called on the Houthis to withdraw from Amran, hand over weaponry seized in the conflict, and release captives, according to the state-run Saba News Agency.

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## Victims of Southern Movement and 2011 uprising to receive compensation

Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

**SANA'A, July 16**—The 2011 Revolutionary Victims Fund, established to provide compensation for those injured and the families of those killed in the 2011 uprising, said that at the end of this month it will begin paying compensation to the victims of both the 2011 uprising and Southern Movement clashes, the fund's head Sara Abdulla Hassan told the Yemen Times.

According to Hassan, the announcement comes after President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi earlier this week ordered the Finance Ministry to begin compensation payments in July. Hassan said she met with Minister of Finance Mohammed Zimam and he promised to follow the president's order.

"The number of the revolution and Southern Movement deaths and injuries are many. We have

800 files about the injured who will receive compensation... There are thousands of additional files in the hands of the ministerial committee overseeing the fund for the wounded and the Wafa Foundation for the Care of Injured Revolutionaries. They promised to hand over the files so that we can start paying compensation," said Hassan.

"We have collected 50 files for those killed and injured who were associated with the Southern Movement but we haven't finished working yet," she added. "Each family will receive (a monthly payment of) YR35,000 (\$162) but we will work to increase it. We hope the new finance minister will not refuse the orders of President Hadi as the previous one used to do."

Relatives of the revolutionary victims expressed fears that the finance minister will not meet the orders of President Hadi.

"We are cautiously optimistic about President Hadi's orders but still fear they will not be implemented. We have been receiving promises since my brother was killed three years ago," said Talal Rizq, brother of Maher Rizq who was killed on the Friday of Dignity on March 18, 2011.

President Hadi issued a decree in September 2013 ordering that the victims of the 2011 uprising be compensated through a fund. The fund was to disperse monthly stipends to those left severely disabled and to the families of those killed. It was also supposed to cover medical costs for the severely injured.

Hassan, the fund's head, said they delayed paying compensation to the victims' between 2012 and 2014 because those victims did not have a special fund, adding that the 2011 Revolutionary

Victims Fund was not fully established until late 2013.

Injured protesters received a \$4,650 lump-sum payment after the 2011 uprising. However, the \$140-163 monthly compensation they were supposed to receive—the equivalent of a soldier's salary—has never been distributed.

According to official statistics previously provided to the Yemen Times by Ali Al-Naemi, the head of the finance committee overseeing the fund for the wounded, the uprising left 1,444 protesters dead and around 29,000 injured—2,000 of whom require medical care from abroad but only 450 of whom received it. About 250 people were left permanently disabled.

Since 2007, 2,000 people from the Southern Movement have been killed and 7,000 have been wounded in protests.

## Bus drivers in Dhamar on strike



Story and photo by  
Abdulkareem Al-Nahari

**DHAMAR, July 16**—Private minibuses drivers in Dhamar governorate on Monday began an indefinite strike in protest against fuel shortages in the governorate.

The drivers claim that the state-owned Yemen Petroleum Company (YPC) branch in Dhamar has effectively encouraged the selling of fuel on the black market by closing one of its two petrol stations in Dhamar city while providing diesel to private gas stations. They allege that the private gas stations distribute only a portion of their fuel stocks on the open market while selling the rest on the black market at inflated prices.

Streets were largely devoid of public transport on Monday because of the strike, which was called for by the minibuses drivers' union.

Clashes between security forces and protesting drivers broke out after the drivers attempted to block major roads. Police fired warning shots to disperse protesters.

Some protesters broke the windows of minibuses belonging to those breaking in the strike but no injuries were reported.

Mohammed Ali Al-Haddad, head of the minibuses drivers' union in Dhamar, told the Yemen Times that: "we went on strike after the director of the YPC's branch in Dhamar refused to regulate the process of providing diesel and closed the gas stations of the com-

pany." Minibus drivers have had to endure long queues at YPC gas stations, from which they receive 40 liters of fuel rations at a time. They claim that fuel woes have worsened since the YPC closed its station while continuing to supply private outlets.

"The new director was appointed only about a month ago but he closed the gas station of the YPC and gave its share of diesel to private gas stations that sell diesel on the black market," added Al-Haddad.

"These gas stations provide half of what they have to consumers and then shut down and sell the rest on the black market for double the price," he added.

Al-Haddad said that the drivers also organized a protest in front of the Dhamar governor's house but the security apparatus dispersed them.

"There are more than 1,700 buses in Dhamar that provide income for about 3,000 families. The suffering of bus drivers gets worse day by day," he added.

A source at the YPC's branch in Dhamar, who spoke to the Yemen Times on condition of anonymity, said that the governorate has witnessed severe fuel shortages because of the high demand for diesel, particularly with the beginning of the growing season when farmers of the breadbasket region rely heavily on diesel-operated water pumps.

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## Pesticide residue tests begin in Sa'ada



Pesticide residue testing being carried out in Sa'ada, the country's main source of Pomegranates.

### ■ Ali Saeed

**SANA'A, July 16**—A team from the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation has been in Sa'ada governorate since Tuesday conducting tests on pomegranates for harmful levels of pesticide residue, Abdullah Masood, head of the Central Lab of Pesticide Residue Analysis, told the Yemen Times.

Sa'ada governorate is the country's main supplier of pomegranates, and the use of potentially harmful pesticides for these and other crops is widespread in Yemen.

The team is checking to see if legal pesticides are being used properly by farmers. According to Fareed Mujawar, minister of agriculture and irrigation, pomegranates will be tested for pesticide residue lev-

els in order to determine whether farmers harvested the crops a sufficient period of time after spraying them with pesticides.

If the farmer is not committed to a specific safety period, which describes the amount of time after which it is considered safe to cultivate and consume the crop, high levels of pesticide residue can have harmful effects on humans. According to the ministry's regulations, the crops would also be unfit for export.

The test conducted on pomegranates in Sa'ada will continue for one week to ensure that the crop is safe and meets export standards, the state-run Saba News Agency reported on Tuesday.

The Central Lab of Pesticide Residue Analysis, which is part of the

ministerial department conducting the tests, is supposed to send inspectors to fresh produce markets nationwide.

In a report released by the Yemen Times in April, Masood said that field visits had not been conducted in the last year-and-a-half due to a lack of funds. During this period of inactivity, none of the fresh produce stocked in Yemen's markets and grocery stores were checked for harmful levels of pesticide residue in accordance with required food safety measures.

However, as of the beginning of July, the department has sufficient funds to carry out the inspections. The Yemen Biosafety Center estimates that an average 2,000 tons of legal agricultural pesticides are imported to Yemen annually.

## Islah moves closer to GPC in light of recent Houthi expansion

### ■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

**SANA'A, July 16**—The Houthi takeover of Amran on July 8 has prompted leading Islah party figures to consider political realignment with the General People's Congress (GPC).

Leading members of Islah, Yemen's second largest party, have made a number of conciliatory gestures towards the GPC as of late, signaling a move away from its long-term opposition towards the party, of which former President Ali Abdullah Saleh remains the nominal leader.

Since 2011, the Houthis have taken over Sa'ada, Amran, broad areas of Hajja and Al-Jawf, and several villages in Sana'a governorate.

Zaid Al-Shami, head of the Islah bloc in parliament, posted a statement on his Facebook page on July 12 demanding Islah leaders to revisit their alliance with political parties in Yemen, particularly the GPC.

Attempts at a rapprochement were also made by leading Islah member Abdulla Al-Odaini. According to an article published by the Yemen Today newspaper, during his Friday sermon in Taiz on



July 11 he described the GPC as a leading political party and as "one of the peace pillars in Yemen."

"The GPC should ally with the Islah Party and the Rashad Salafi Union in order to fend off the dangers that the Houthis pose to the Yemeni people," the newspaper quoted Al-Odaini as saying.

According to Yaseen Al-Tamimi, a Sana'a-based political analyst, "the statements of the Islah leadership, particularly Zaid Al-Shami, do not suggest rebuilding relations with Saleh." He explains that leading Islah members like Al-Shami are referring to their relationship with the GPC as a party.

Major fault lines have opened up within the GPC since the 2011 uprising and Hadi's election to

Yemen's presidency in February 2012. Two major camps center around Hadi and Saleh.

The GPC and the Islah Party were previously allies, forming a united front in Yemen's 1994 civil war and forming a coalition government from 1994 to 1997. After Islah split with the GPC during the 1997 parliamentary elections, it helped orchestrate an alliance of opposition parties called the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP). Existing divides between the GPC and Islah deepened during the 2006 presidential elections, and in 2011, despite initial hesitation, Islah joined Yemen's political uprising, playing a central role in the ousting of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

## Generator fumes kill eight family members in Dhamar

### ■ Abdulkareem Al-Nahari

**DHAMAR, July 16**—Eight members of the same family died in Dhamar governorate after inhaling toxic fumes from an electricity generator in the early hours of Monday morning. Five others survived but were hospitalized.

The family from Dhamar's Otama district was operating the generator in a closed room without adequate ventilation.

Abdulhaq Al-Samawi, an officer from the local Criminal Investigations Department, told the Yemen Times that the family of Abdulla Ali Ahmed Al-Adwar bought the generator at the beginning of Ra-

madan. He added that one relative arrived at the house at about 3 AM and found the family members motionless.

Al-Samawi said that neighbors rushed to the scene once alerted and helped transport the victims to hospital. A mother, a young girl, and five children under the age of five were dead at the scene. Another girl died in intensive care on Tuesday.

Generators are especially commonplace in Yemen due to repeated power cuts.

Dr. Mohammed Al-Jamah, manager of the Health Office in Dhamar, said that operating generators in confined spaces is ex-

tremely dangerous due to the accumulation of toxic fumes, including carbon monoxide, which can result in suffocation.

Dr. Aziz Al-Zindani, the head of Dhamar Public Hospital, said, "other members of the family who survived are in the intensive care unit. We are keeping an eye on them, but one woman is still in critical condition."

Dhamar governor Yahia Al-Amri visited the victims and ordered that they be treated at the expense of the local authority.

In July 2013, 14 people died in Milhan district of Mahweet in a fire caused by a generator operated indoors.

## Netherlands grants Yemen \$4.9 million in aid

### ■ Ali Saeed

**SANA'A, July 16**—The Netherlands agreed on Monday to grant Yemen \$4.9 million to finance a project aimed at managing water resources in the Sana'a Basin, according to the state-run Saba News Agency.

Part of the project will entail a study of Sana'a's water reserves. This will include an effort to determine groundwater replenishment rates, water consumption levels, and water usage for irrigation, according to Ali Al-Suraimi, head of the National Water Resources Authority.

The water level in the Sana'a

Basin drops by six to seven meters annually, reflecting a rate of water consumption that outpaces replenishment. The gap between consumption and replenishment is estimated at over 1.5 billion cubic meters, according to Al-Suraimi.

He explains that the current agricultural irrigation system in Yemen is inefficient, contributing to unnecessarily high levels of water consumption.

In its attempt to improve the sustainability of Sana'a's water management, the Dutch government is co-operating with the Yemeni National Water Resources Authority and other stakeholders

like the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The management of natural resources is one of the key elements in the FAO Yemen Plan of Action 2014-2018.

Yemen's acute water shortages and the problems they pose for food security threaten to feed into an already volatile political situation

In a 2010 report commissioned by the Yemeni government, analysts at US Consultancy firm McKinsey forecasted that if water use in the Sana'a Basin was not controlled and improved, the area could completely run out of water by around 2020.

USAID'S Yemen Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and Food for Peace Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Project (YOFMEP) invites **Yemeni Nationals** to apply for the position below.

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The deadline for receiving applications is **July 31, 2014**.

### Correction:

- In Tuesday's issue (15/07/2014), the Yemen Times article 'Military shake-up in Amran' mistakenly read that Major General Ali Mohsen was sacked. The article was supposed to have said that military leaders seen as being close to Mohsen were sacked. Mohsen was dismissed in April, 2013.
- In a separate page 2 article titled 'Armed tribesmen sabotage oil pipeline' it was stated that Jaber Al-Shabwani was governor of Marib at the time of his death. Al-Shabwani was actually deputy governor.



# Politics of Qat: The Role of a Drug in Ruling Yemen

## By Peer Gatter

Book review and extracts  
**Nadia Al-Sakkaf**

The cover page shows an old man with an apprehensive look in his eyes, half-smiling as he hands you a bunch of qat leaves. In the background there is a wild-eyed teenage boy, cheeks swollen from the qat that fills them, peering into the camera.

This 862 page hard-cover book published by Reichert Publications is a weap-

on in all senses of the word. Besides documenting the ever growing role qat plays in Yemen and in the life of Yemenis, the book also analyses Yemen's qat policy, the tribal qat economy, and the qat connections of our decision makers.

I had this huge publication lying by my bedside for months before I summoned the courage to pick it up and start reading. This was not only due to its intimidating size, but probably even more so due to its

topic. Qat, and the political and economic schemes around it, were to me as a Yemeni always a well-known problem. I just was too afraid to read for myself and acknowledge how I as a citizen am part of a society that enables this culture of qat.

I don't chew Qat and personally I am ardently opposed to it. But I live in a society where Qat prevails. After years of research, Peer Gatter, the author of this book, published it in 2012, offering to the

world an insight into this drug and what it has done to my country. Gatter was working for many years for the World Bank and UNDP in Yemen and is now heading the Integrated Expert Program for Afghanistan of the German Development Cooperation (GIZ-CIM).

To read more about the book go to [www.qat-yemen.com](http://www.qat-yemen.com)



PART 6

# Revolutionary Yemen and the Issue of Qat

**W**ith independence from the British in southern Yemen and the end of Imamate rule in the north, a generation of modernizers and technocrats came to power in both parts of the country, dreaming of rational development and scientific socialism.

Both governments would eventually launch aggressive campaigns against qat as the drug was seen as a symbol of backwardness and conservatism, as the financial backbone of tribalism, and as an impediment to modernity and economic development.

## Part 2 of 2: Politics of Qat in North Yemen during the 60s and 70s

The mentors of the republican revolution—with Muhammad Mahmud Al-Zubayri leading the way—had denounced qat for engendering decadence and poverty, and associated the evils of qat with the despotism of the Imamate. The new political elite that controlled the fate of mountainous Yemen after the successful 1962 coup against Imam Muhammad Al-Badr thus held qat accountable for Yemen's backwardness and for the country's isolation during the rule of the Hamid Al-Din dynasty.

In many of his speeches, Yemen's first president, Brigadier General Abd Allah Al-Sallal thus denounced qat during the early 1960s and threatened to uproot the plants—quite possibly not only for altruistic humanitarian reasons, but also to deprive the royalist tribes still fighting his government of their most important source of revenue (in terms of economic importance earnings from qat cultivation were closely followed by Saudi allowances to the tribes).

In 1964, Al-Sallal issued a presidential decree against chewing in government offices. However, it was ignored from its start, especially because Al-Sallal was known to chew at times himself in the Presidential Office. He also banned qat use in the armed forces.

Al-Sallal could also not ignore the benefits of qat for his administration that was appallingly underfinanced. He soon came to realize the economic potential of the drug and its contribution to government finances in a predominantly agrarian state without explored oil reserves. By 1969, qat revenues amounted to YR300 million (ca. \$60 million) and accounted for 15.5 percent of the country's GDP. Only five years later, in 1974, this had risen to YR1 billion and qat contributed to 49.4 percent of agricultural GDP and to 34 percent of total GDP.

Once the decadent reign of the Hamid Al-Din family had ended, it was not long before the opposition to qat began to fade away. The "democratization" of qat was soon seen by many as one of the revolu-

tion's great achievements. Habitual chewing was now no longer a prerogative of the rich and powerful—qat had become a public commodity. But President Al-Sallal's ban on qat use in the armed forces remained in place and was still upheld during the 1970s.

After Al-Sallal went into exile in 1967, he was replaced by Qadi Abd Al-Rahman Yahya Al-Iryani, the only civilian to rule Yemen after the revolution, and the only one of the country's 20th century presidents who did not chew qat. He was a close confidant of Al-Zubayri, who was assassinated two years earlier and whose extreme views on qat he shared. Yet, he was rational enough to realize that it was impossible to fight qat as long as Yemen was not at peace, and as long as the government had not succeeded in consolidating its power vis-à-vis the royalists and the tribes.

### Prime Minister Al-Ayni's "suicidal" anti-qat campaign

In early May 1972, Prime Minister Muhsin Ahmad Al-Ayni publicly expressed his government's concern for the health, social, and economic consequences of qat chewing. Out of the blue—as it appeared to many Yemenis—he embarked on a several-month-long anti-qat campaign that some analysts have portrayed as suicidal.

Al-Ayni issued an order to all public sector officials and civil servants, including ministers, to stop chewing qat. The order prohibited chewing during working hours, on government premises, and in public places. Government employees not respecting this order were to be dismissed.

The qat ban was also supposed to be accompanied by a number of social and economic measures beyond the agricultural sector. These included the promotion of alternative cultural and sports activities, the creation of new jobs, a taxation on qat sellers, and a rather radical reform of official working hours for civil servants.

In order to keep government employees from joining afternoon chewing sessions, the decision was taken to fragment the working day.

Without extending actual working hours, the workday of civil servants changed from an 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. shift to working from 8 to 12 a.m., and—disrupted by a long lunch break—again from 3 to 5 p.m.

To give his anti-qat policy more authority, Al-Ayni convinced President Abd Al-Rahman Al-Iryani, a prominent and well respected faqih and qadi, to issue a fatwa that would prohibit qat on the basis of the sharia due to the harm caused by its consumption.

Few paid attention to this legal opinion and a number of qat farmers went as far as approaching more "liberal" jurists who issued fatwas declaring that qat planting and selling did not in the least conflict with the sharia and was thus indeed legal.

Al-Ayni contented himself with a decree (Decree for the Welfare of the People), well aware that a law would need ratification by the Parliament, and would most likely not obtain a majority among the delegates. The government-controlled Al-Thawra newspaper published Al-Ayni's decree, describing qat as a drug. This provoked very emotional reactions in Yemen's cities, particularly among religious scholars who contested this interpretation on religious grounds.

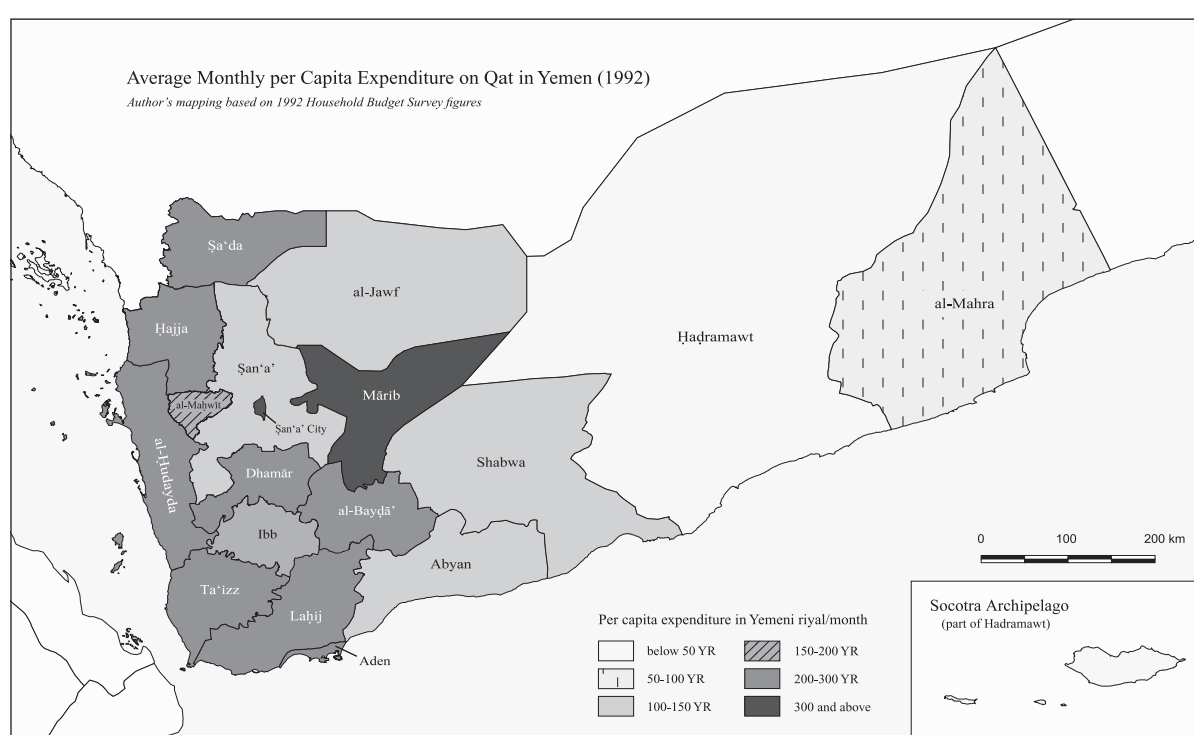
His implacable stance towards the crop won Al-Ayni the mocking name "First Enemy of Qat" (al-adū al-awwal lil- qat). Al-Ayni possibly considered it as an honorary title in his struggle against what he called "the danger which threatens Yemen's present and future."

The order of banning qat was paralleled by a massive awareness campaign on the deleterious consequences of qat. Schools were to include lessons on qat in their curricula and, at the request of the government, all local newspapers included a series of articles describing the social and health hazards of qat and its ruinous effect on Yemen's economy.

Soap operas, skits, and real life dramas were enacted and presented at public holiday celebrations to demonstrate the family conflicts associated with qat use. Readings of anti-qat poetry and interviews with physicians on the health consequences of qat were broadcast, and inspirational slogans were slipped into general radio addresses, such as "qat is good, but one can also eat apples," or "if each qat consumer would put five riyals in a cashbox at the entrance of a qat market, one could construct a factory each month." Some 50 anti-qat songs were recorded at the time by well known Yemeni singers, most of whom were of course qat chewers.

Confronted with the sharp reaction from the public that put in jeopardy its very existence, the government soon renounced its decisions on qat. Al-Ayni's booklet against qat, "bi-shay al-qat" (Concerning Qat), disappeared from the shelves of bookstores, and by October 1972 the public debate in the newspapers had died down. Also, the uplifting anti-qat songs and poems were no longer aired by radio stations.

Until today qat awareness has never again been included in educational curricula and no minister of education has dared to follow up on this matter after 1972, as Al-Ayni had badly burned his fingers with the slender, flame-shaped leaves.



Until today the subject of qat is not touched upon in Yemen's schools. However, following an anti-qat campaign organized by youth activists on April 12, 2012 the minister of education of Yemen's transitional government, Dr. 'Abdul Razzaq Al-Ashwal, declared that he was committed to including qat awareness in school curricula in Sana'a and Taiz henceforth.



**President Ahmad Husayn al-Ghashmi allegedly popularized "qatal" – qat leaves plucked off their branches and packed into handy plastic bags.**

In late December 1972 Al-Ayni stepped down and was replaced by the conservative qadi Abd Allah Al-Hajri. Yemenis generally agree today—as do a number of foreign analysts—that the failed anti-qat campaign caused or at least contributed to Al-Ayni's downfall. Willingly they point out how politically treacherous anti-qat campaigns in Yemen are and what enormous power qat producers have over—or within the government. Al-Ayni's example certainly served as a warning to politicians and may well explain why it took President Ali Abdullah Saleh 20 years before speaking out against qat.

### Al-Hamdi brings qat back into the focus of politics

On June 13, 1974, the military overthrew the government of President Abd Al-Rahman Al-Iryani, claiming it had become ineffective. Lieutenant-Colonel Ibrahim Al-Hamdi was named President of a Military Command Council which henceforth governed the country. Among its first actions were the suspension of Yemen's constitution and the dissolution of the Consultative Council.

Al-Hamdi, who is described as one of the most dynamic and progressive Yemeni leaders, came from a family of qadis in Iyal Surayh (today in Amran governorate). He came to power with the toleration, if not support, of the tribes.

But Al-Hamdi soon began to curtail the supremacy of the tribes as the "Corrective Movement" began to strengthen the powers of central government. Al-Hamdi's presidency also brought qat once again into the focus of politics. Despite being himself an unyielding chewer, Al-Hamdi discouraged its production and sale, as he perceived the enormous revenues that the qat trade washed into the tribal areas as a threat to the power of his regime.

In July 1975, Al-Hamdi confirmed the taxation of qat at 30 percent of its sales value and issued a number of decrees for making taxation more efficient. He banned chewing in the armed forces and proscribed transport of qat on military planes, a law still nominally in place today. The government also provided credits on concessional terms to farmers who agreed to substitute qat with alternative crops, such a coffee and fruit trees. In October 1975, qat sales were banned within the perimeter of Sana'a.

After less than a month, however, qat merchants were allowed to return to their old places of sale because a number of high military figures had allegedly complained to the president of the long distances they now had to take upon themselves in order to buy qat.

The circumstances of Al-Hamdi's assassination remain mysterious, he is said to have been chewing qat when he was shot.

### Al-Ghashmi: Buying loyalty with qat

Whoever assassinated Al-Hamdi, his death paved the way for a concili-

ation between tribes and state and for renewed influence of tribal leaders over the fate of Yemeni politics—including the fortunes of qat. Al-Hamdi was succeeded by Ahmad Husayn Al-Ghashmi, a member of the Military Command Council and army chief of staff. By the time Ahmad Husayn Al-Ghashmi had reached the zenith of his power, his family controlled extensive qat estates in Hamdan.

By supplying the nearby Sana'a markets with qat, his clan had made a fortune. Even today Al-Ghashmi is warmly remembered for his generous gifts of qat that won him the hearts of his troops.

In oral Yemeni history Al-Ghashmi is identified as the person who popularized 'qatal' (literally meaning cut or sever). This is the name for qat leaves plucked off their branches and packed into handy plastic bags—the most common form in which qat is sold in Sana'a today. As a military man he found it reportedly more appropriate to tie a small bag of qat to an army waist belt or to a Kalashnikov strap than a long bunch of "baladi" twigs that could easily hamper the use of firearms at critical moments and have a negative effect on military preparedness. Until then qat was only sold in bunches of twigs or branches of up to a meter's length ("baladi" might be translated as "locally grown," "homegrown," "natural," or "wild qat"). The invention of qatal also revolutionized the qat sector from an economic point of view. By plucking off only leaves and shoots and leaving the branches intact—as is done with tea—qat could now be harvested up to five times a year instead of only two. Al-Ghashmi is said to have developed this idea in 1977 or 1978 while chewing qat in the village of Qariyat Al-Malika in Bani Hushaysh.

But even qat could not buy Al-Ghashmi stability. Quite the contrary, it seems, as his foible for qat may have to be blamed for his tragic end. On June 24, 1978, he met an early death when a southern emissary blew up a briefcase bomb that ostensibly contained a secret message from South Yemen's head of state Salim Rubay Ali. Beforehand, Al-Ghashmi had reportedly sent a shipment of qat to his southern counterpart who had repaid him through a messenger.

Commodity	1981 Survey		1987 Survey	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Cereals	13.7	15.5	10.8	16.9
Pulses	2.9	2.3	2.7	2.2
Vegetables	9.0	4.6	9.7	7.0
Fruit	6.9	5.6	6.5	4.7
Meats, poultry, fish & eggs	22.5	20.0	21.5	17.7
Milk and dairy products	4.3	5.9	4.6	5.4
Edible fats and oils	3.3	6.8	3.3	6.6
Sugar & its products	3.5	3.9	3.5	4.8
Beverages	6.9	6.7	6.1	5.9
Tobacco products	3.5	3.0	4.0	3.8
Qat	19.7	23.0	23.1	22.5
Other foodstuffs	3.8	2.7	4.2	2.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Central Planning Organization 1981, p. 13, and 1987, p. 23 (quoted in Thabet 1994, p. 40).





# Prickly Pears

Already a source of income for many, could the prickly pear be the answer for Yemen's cash-strapped, vulnerable farmers

Story by **Ali Abulohoom**  
and **Micah Reddy**  
Photos by **Ali Abulohoom**

**T**he prickly pear is ubiquitous in Sana'a at this time of year. The fruit's juicy yellow-orange pulp provides a welcome refreshment during the hot summer months, when vendors sell them in heaps atop rickety pushcarts.

The prickly pear, or *opuntia ficus-indica*, a member of the cactus family, is native to the Americas. Since Columbus, it has spread across the world and is widely cultivated around the Mediterranean, in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, South Africa, and other regions.

On the face of it, the humble prickly pear hardly seems like something that would stir much controversy, but in fact it has proven to be a rather thorny issue in the past. Conservationists in Australia and South Africa, for instance, campaigned vigorously against the plant, viewing it as an invasive species and a serious threat to local biodiversity.

Nevertheless, for all the controversy, the plant has long been a valuable asset, and not only for its fleshy fruit. The prickly pear cactus is used in building plaster and is useful as a natural barrier with its thick and thorny pads. It is also the most common host for the cochineal insect, the source of vibrant red dye that was the mainstay of a number of local pre-colonial economies in Central America, becoming an even more sought-after commodity with the coming of the Spanish.

The plant remains economically important for many communities, especially in poorer parts of the world. William Beinart, professor of African Studies at the University of Oxford and author of the book "Prickly Pear: A Social History of a Plant in the Eastern Cape," has explored the many uses of the plant in rural South Africa, where it is used in the production of homemade beer that provides a sorely needed source of income for many rural families.

Similarly, the plant's hardiness and versatility make it a popular crop in arid, drought-prone Yemen, where it is commonly seen dotted along roadsides and growing on patches of dry land. Unlike other widely grown crops such as qat, the prickly pear is very water efficient and does not require much in the way of costly inputs such as fertilizer.

The vendors in Sana'a get their pears from Noqm Market—a popular wholesale venue east of Sana'a where a wide variety of fruit and vegetables can be found. Most of the prickly pears sold in the market come from Sanhan and Khawlan districts, south-east of Sana'a.

Faraj Saleh, a 35-year-old farmer from Sanhan district, says that he uprooted his qat plants and replaced them with prickly pears almost seven years ago. "I tried once to bring the pears to the market to see whether they would sell like other fruit. When I came back home with a lot of money in my pocket I decided to plant prickly pears instead of qat," said Saleh.

Saleh has four plots of land totaling 4,000 square meters planted with prickly pears. Many of his neighbours have followed suit in taking up prickly pear cultivation. He says he manages to sell 20 boxes a day during the harvest, which can last up to three months and occurs twice yearly. The cost of one box ranges from YR500 to 2,000 (\$2.33-9.31) according to the quality of the batch.

Yahia Sufian, a farmer from Khawlan district, said that he has more than 10,000 square meters of land on which he grows prickly pears. He claims to be in about YR2 million (\$10,000) with each harvest.



Besides producing fruit, the cacti have been put to a number of different uses. Cactus juice is used in plaster and the cochineal insects that are drawn to the plants have long been a source of red dye.



Jameel Ahmed is a 15-year-old street vendor. He buys the pears from Noqm Market to sell every day during Ramadan. "I sell four boxes every day and I earn a reasonable amount of money—about YR2,000 a day," Ahmed says.





Vendors use gloves to protect their hands from the fine thorns that cover the fruit's waxy skin.



Saleh transformed his qat plantation behind his home into rows of prickly pears. "Pears need less care than qat," he says, adding that the pear can be quite lucrative.



Prickly pear cacti are highly resistant plants that can grow in very arid conditions. Given Yemen's perennial water shortages, the prickly pear is in many ways an ideal crop for Yemeni farmers. The cacti also do not require heavy tilling and working of the land. "You just throw the pear plant into the earth, a week later you can see it grow and thrive without ploughing or watering," Sufian says.



Farmers use a long stick with a cup on the end to pluck the pears from their thorny environs.

# US government spying on prominent Muslim Americans, report says

■ Yemen Times Staff

The US government has been monitoring the emails of prominent Muslim Americans, according to documents released by ex-National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden. A report released by the Intercept, a website started by former Guardian journalist Glenn Greenwald, explores the background of Muslim American men who were monitored by the FBI and the NSA.

Among the men are a former Republican Party candidate for public office who served in the Department of Homeland Security under President George W. Bush, as well as academics, attorneys and civil rights activists. The monitoring ostensibly targets those involved in terrorism or espionage.

The three-month investigation by the Intercept, which "[includes] interviews with more than a dozen current and former federal law enforcement officials involved in the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) process—reveals that in practice, the system for authorizing NSA surveillance affords the government wide latitude in spying on US citizens," according to the website.

The spreadsheet lists 7,485 email addresses that were monitored between 2002 and 2008.

Five Muslim Americans are profiled in the report:

- Faisal Gill, a Republican Party candidate and former Department of Homeland Security employee
- Asim Ghafoor, a lawyer who represented clients in terrorism-related cases
- Hooshang Amirahmadi, an Iranian-American professor at Rutgers University
- Agha Saeed, a former political science professor at California State University
- Nihad Awad, the executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations

The NSA and Department of Justice responded to the report by saying the emails of Americans are only accessed if there is probable cause of involvement in terrorism or espionage, denying that the religious or ethnic backgrounds of the men had anything to do with the monitoring of their emails.

"I just don't know why," Gill told the Intercept. His AOL and Yahoo! email accounts were monitored while he was a Republican candi-

date for public office in Virginia. "I've done everything in my life to be patriotic. I served in the Navy, served in the government, was active in my community—I've done everything that a good citizen, in my opinion, should do."

None of the five men named in the report have been charged with a crime.

***"I just don't know why...I've done everything in my life to be patriotic. I served in the Navy, served in the government, was active in my community—I've done everything that a good citizen, in my opinion, should do."***

The report has brought up questions regarding the standards the government must meet to monitor US citizens. Critics of the agencies and these monitoring tactics argue that under current policy it is enough for a prominent Muslim American to simply disagree with the government to earn them a spot on the list of those being monitored.

Yemeni-American writer and activist, and the co-founder of the Support Yemen media collective, Rooj Alwazir, told the Yemen Times she was not surprised that the government has been monitoring Muslim Americans who have not been charged with any crime.

"I am not one bit surprised that my government is gathering information and spying on people, particularly those of us who are brown with Muslim names. Post-racial America is a joke. Right after 9/11 with the patriot act, I knew immediately our rights were taken away from us," Alwazir said.

The report was released in the wake of another recent release, this time by a federal appeals court as a result of a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request by the New York Times and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

The release was of a State De-

partment memo authorizing the targeted killing of an American citizen in Yemen, Anwar Al-Awlaki. Al-Awlaki was killed in a US drone strike in September 2011. He is the son of Nasser Al-Awlaki, the former Yemeni minister of agriculture and irrigation.

Jameel Jaffer, an ACLU lawyer, told the New York Times that "the government claims authority to carry out targeted killings of Americans deemed to threaten national security—the public surely has a right to know the breadth of the authority the government is claiming as well as the legal basis for that authority."

The monitoring of Muslim Americans and the release of the memos have once again focused attention on government secrecy under the Obama Administration.

Jill Abramson, the former executive editor of the New York Times, has called the Obama administration the most secretive administration she has ever covered.

This is not the first time data collection methods have fallen under scrutiny.

In February, the Intercept revealed that the NSA was primarily using electronic surveillance, rather than human intelligence, to locate targets for drone strikes.

A former drone operator for the military's Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) said the agency usually identifies targets based on metadata analysis and cellphone tracking. The tactics have resulted in the deaths of innocent or unidentified people, the Intercept said, because a target's identity is not confirmed with operatives or informants on the ground.

"The CIA or the US military then orders a strike based on the activity and location of the mobile phone a person is believed to be using," according to the Intercept.

"As a result, even when the agency correctly identifies and targets a SIM card belonging to a terror suspect, the phone may actually be carried by someone else, who is then killed in a strike. According to the former drone operator, the geolocation cells at the NSA that run the tracking program—known as Geo Cell—sometimes facilitate strikes without knowing whether the individual in possession of a tracked cell phone or SIM card is in fact the intended target of the strike."

The Obama administration's refusal to appeal the federal appeals court decision ordering it to release the memo has raised the hopes of some that the administration is increasing transparency.







# Fifth Power aims to strengthen role of youth in the transition

■ Ali Abulohoom

Yemeni youth are widely credited with igniting the 2011 uprising in Yemen which eventually led to the ousting of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

However, many youth complain that their role has been diminished since established political parties, which opposed Saleh's regime during the uprising, quieted down with the signing of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative, which drew parties further into the corridors of power.

The GCC initiative's main provisions were the formation of a coalition government in which power would be shared equally between the General People Congress—the party of which Saleh remains official leader—and established opposition parties; the holding of the comprehensive National Dialogue Conference (NDC); reconstruction of the army as a means of reducing Saleh's influence; and the provision of immunity to Saleh and members of his regime.

Following the single-candidate presidential election in February 2012, which brought then Vice President Hadi to power, the political transition came into effect. The NDC, which drew to a close in early 2014, involved over 560 representatives from different political parties, local NGOs, and civil society, including women and youth groups.

Many youth argue their representatives in the NDC were not legitimate representatives of the independent youth who took to the streets in 2011, but were rather representing political parties and NGOs.

Shaib Al-Qudaimi, a member of the February 3rd Movement which rallied in Change Square, said he was surprised when reading in the news-

papers which youth were named to be the movement's representatives in the NDC.

"No committee visited Change Square to select the youth representing us. The names of the youth had been chosen by political parties," Al-Qudaimi said. In his opinion, it was obvious that the youth participating in the NDC did not represent those who gathered in Change Square and who have vehemently opposed the Gulf-brokered initiative.

Abdualrahman Jalbain, a member of the January 15th Movement which also took part in the Change Square demonstrations, explains that "the protest marches that set off following the start of the NDC were kept silent as the media outlets, which belong to political parties, disappeared once the transition period started."

Resonate! Yemen, a youth-run foundation aiming to bring the voices and ideas of young Yemenis to the forefront of the country's public policy discourse, charges that the youth have been marginalized.

To counter the trend of marginalization, Resonate! Yemen established Fifth Power, a youth group aiming to integrate youth into the political transition. Through Fifth Power, young and politically interested Yemenis can engage in shaping the country's future through monitoring the transitional period and the extent to which political parties adhere to the GCC-brokered initiative.

The group's name stems from the idea that a fifth power—the Yemeni public—should watch over the country's other four powers: the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government and the media.

Thirty youth from different local NGOs were selected on the basis of their accomplishments in the fields of research and the monitoring of human rights. Starting in November

2012, they were trained for one-and-a-half years on how to conduct field research and write reports.

The youth were then divided into three working groups with different tasks: one group for monitoring the political transition, one for monitoring humanitarian aid, and another dedicated to monitoring the reconstruction of the army.

Each group submitted a monthly report on developments in their respective field during the one-and-a-half year period. They conducted research, visited government offices to get information and contacted decision makers. They concluded their efforts with a final report on the overall developments during the transitional period.

Released at the beginning of June, the Fifth Power's final report aims "to be a reference for local and international bodies in case they need to know what is really happening during the transitional period and how committed political actors have been to the GCC initiative," according to Mostafa Al-Mansour, head of the group monitoring humanitarian aid.

Sixty percent of the transition deadlines and technical criteria (holding of meetings, discussions, etc.) have not been adhered to by the political parties, according to Adnan Al-Rajehi, a member of the group monitoring the political transition.

In addition, the government has been unable to implement the pledges made by the Friends of Yemen, said Al-Rajehi. "Aid pledges kept circulating as abstract numbers but were not delivered on the ground."

The report revealed that only \$1.8 billion of about \$8.1 billion worth of aid has been received by the government so far. "The Friends of Yemen distrust the government and remain skeptical about how useful their pledges really are," said Al-Rajehi.

The humanitarian aid monitor-



Fifth Power members argue that the youth who participated in the NDC were not representative of the youth demonstrating in Change Square.

ing group, according to Al-Mansour, said that aid is being diverted to the reconstruction of war-torn areas instead of being spent on new development.

According to the Fifth Power report, the government has failed to establish security and prevent economic unrest. Attacks on electricity stations and fuel pipelines have dramatically intensified.

The group tasked with monitoring the reconstruction of the army reported that since reforms began with the disbandment of the Republican Guard in December 2012, President Hadi has successfully removed the leaders whose allegiances were to Saleh. However, much more needs

to be done, according to the group's leader, Meshal Al-Awbali.

"One of the most formidable challenges the government and the president are facing are 'phantom jobs' in the army, of which there are estimated to be 50,000," he said. Deceased and former soldiers remain listed in the military and the government pays wages which are then pocketed by powerful military officials. According to Al-Awbali, "this problem still exists and has yet to be resolved."

"The transitional period has been crippled by three main challenges: attacks on public services, the war on terror in the South, and the confrontation between the Houthis and

the army in the north," explains Al-Mansour.

In light of these security challenges, the Fifth Power began organizing workshops and symposiums teaching volunteers how to monitor Yemen's political transition in spite of the country's numerous conflicts impeding its reform process.

With the end of the NDC, the Fifth Power also began to monitor the Constitutional Drafting Committee, according to Al-Rajehi.

"We have some representatives attending the committee sessions and providing us with regular reports," he explains, noting that so far the reports have commented positively on the committee's progress.

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## أجمل التهاني والتبريكات نهديا

للأخ / محمد يحيى الشمسي

بمناسبة إرتزاقه المولودة الجديدة الذي أسماها

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أ / عبدالمعطي الشمسي  
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**YT vision statement**

**"To make Yemen a good world citizen."**

Prof. Abdulaziz Al-Saqqaf, (1951 - 1999) Founder of Yemen Times



**OUR OPINION**

**We need serious efforts to deal with effects of internal displacement**

**Y**emen's numerous conflicts have consequences that reach far beyond the battlefield. In 2012, violence in Sa'ada and Abyan led to the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Yemen so far, with more than 500,000 Yemenis forced to leave their homes.

The recent outbreak of fighting in Amran turned upwards of 70,000 Yemenis into IDPs. Just two months ago, the conflict in Shabwa forced 20,000 to move.

Today more than 321,000 Yemenis qualify as IDPs.

The impact of displacement does not end with the return of IDPs to their homes and their ability to make a living again. There are longer-term social and psychological effects linked to displacement which have been largely ignored by the state.

Due to the conflict in Sa'ada, for example, a generation of students has lost at least two years of schooling and is unlikely to be able to catch up or re-integrate fully into the education system. There are no comprehensive rehabilitation programs in place that could help returning children to settle back in.

Government policies talk about sustaining peace, reconstructing damaged areas, and providing the returnees with income-generating means. These are necessary steps that should be prioritized, but so are psychiatric evaluation and support initiatives.

The current generation of displaced children is vulnerable to psychological trauma due to the violence, uncertainty and high instability they have experienced.

Internal displacement does not only put a strain on IDPs but also on host communities, which are often overlooked. Their lives are interrupted and complicated as they have to share limited resources, such as water, electricity, or job opportunities. Since IDPs are often sheltered in schools, it is again children who are negatively affected, having to relocate elsewhere to receive their education.

We should learn from the experiences of other conflict-ridden countries in the region, such as Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria. If the state is unable to responsibly deal with the social and psychological problems caused by increased internal migration, civil society and religious institutions should fill in. We must spread awareness about current and impending difficulties linked to increasing numbers of IDPs in Yemen and create initiatives to mitigate the negative impact of displacement.

**Nadia Al-Sakkaf**

**Shout Art Loud:**

**Tackling harassment in Egypt through art**

**Melody Patry**  
muffah.org  
First published July 14

**I**n the past three years Egypt has witnessed a dramatic increase in both the number of cases of sexual harassment against women and the level of violence. More than 500 women were victims of sexual crimes during the period from February 2011 to January 2014. In addition to thousands of sexual harassment reports, sexual crimes included gang rapes and sexual assaults by mobs with sharp objects and fingers. Women are also commonly assaulted in the street, on public transport, and mob attacks and rapes are frequent during mass gatherings. In response, Egypt last month approved a new law criminalizing sexual harassment for the first time.

Yet just days later, the video of a particularly brutal mob sexual assault was posted online, provoking national and international outcry. This was not an attack in some out-of-the-way Cairo back alley. The assault in the video took place in Tahrir Square—the focus of the public demonstrations that triggered the ousting of President Mubarak in 2011 and President Morsi two years later. Moreover, the attack was carried out during the celebrations of the inauguration of newly-elected president Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi.

Nor was this an isolated incident. At least eight other cases of sexual violence were reported that night, including mob assaults and gang rapes. For many, the attacks were further proof that laws alone are not enough to curb sexual violence in Egypt.

"Complete recognition for all these crimes needs to be made, and a holistic

national strategy needs to be implemented, which has been called for since January 2013 by several feminist organizations," says Amal Elmohandes, director of the women human rights defenders program at Nazra for Feminist Studies. Efforts to address sexual harassment and assault cannot be limited to a change in the penal code. One area in which resistance against sexual violence is flourishing is the arts.

While it took until June 2014 for the Egyptian authorities to amend the law and criminalize sexual harassment and sexual assault, projects to report and denounce sexual violence have multiplied since 2011—and artistic expression is a driving force in campaigns for change.

Index on Censorship, an international organization that promotes and defends free expression, is exploring how Egyptians are using art to tackle the issue of sexual harassment and violence through a new interactive documentary. Through examples of theatre, street art, comic strips, and even rap music, it shows artists' ability to break taboos and challenge deep-rooted social stereotypes at a time when civil society is pushing for action to fight impunity and "end the social acceptability of sexual harassment and assault in Egypt."

"We as artists are expressing some problems related to sexual harassment; we are trying to analyze. But we are not enough," says Rana el Husseiny, an actress and painter who participated in a three-week theatre workshop in 2012 on sexual harassment in Cairo. In a collaboration between organizations Studio 15/3 and Heya Foundation for Women, participants shared—often for the first time—personal stories when they had either witnessed or suffered sexual harassment.

After the workshop a male participant commented, "during the workshop I realized there were some things women consider sexual harassment I was not aware of." Another participant said that the workshop emboldened him to act next time he sees someone harassing a girl in the street.

**"We as artists are expressing some problems related to sexual harassment; we are trying to analyze. But we are not enough,"**

Among the female participants, many welcomed the active participation of men, saying that they felt more understood, but also that it was important for men to know what their sisters and mothers have to put up to on a daily basis.

"The population needs to speak, we need to have some sort of communication with the population.

Art is our way to communicate directly with people and it triggers discussion among society. Whether we do that through plays or art exhibitions, we need to do more," said Al-Husseiny.

Reaching out to the masses is a real challenge in a country where 99 percent of women have experienced some form of sexual harassment and 80 percent feel unsafe in the street. A comprehensive approach to address such a rampant issue is needed. Among the various channels available, art has proved to be a powerful agent of change, particularly

when traditional forms of protest and advocacy seem so powerless, and when politicians, the police, and judiciary seem unwilling—or unable—to lead it.

Already, street performances and communications campaigns are encouraging witnesses and survivors of sexual violence to speak up. The emergence of graffiti tackling the issue on Cairo's walls further demonstrates the importance of art in addressing gender discrimination and sexual violence.

Feminist graffiti, stencils and murals appear next to revolutionary slogans and show the overlap with popular forms of protest.

In June 2014, Egyptian activists once again took to the streets to denounce sexual violence. While chanting "woman's voice is revolution" they held banners, including the now widely-used poster created by artist Al-Zeft in support of female protestors, showing Nefertiti wearing a tear-gas mask. This is a case in point of art's role in promoting debate and inspiring social change.

"I am convinced that the recent criminalization of sexual harassment in Egypt is a result of the increasing pressure from civil society to denounce sexual harassment and assaults," says Aya Faissal, former project manager at a Cairo-based women's rights organization. "This includes artistic initiatives. They are complementary to any kind of political action and judicial prosecutions of harassers, in a common effort to put an end to impunity."

Melody Patry is Senior Advocacy Officer at free speech organization Index on Censorship.

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**Utilizing the potential of Yemen's diaspora lobby**

**■ Murad al-Azzany**

**I**n Washington DC, lobbying is mainly concerned with congressional influence. But it is not exclusively confined to Congress and by its very nature it occurs across the whole of the US, including government and non-government agencies. Effective lobbying strategies tend to derive from highly motivated and well-organized lobby groups with sharply focused agendas, a case in point being the Israel lobby and the lobbying arm of the National Rifle Association, the Institute for Legislative Action.

These groups are very successful in pushing Israel's agenda and calling for the "right to bear arms." Though many consider lobbying to be mired by corruption, others believe it to be an essential part of a healthy and functioning democracy.

Can Yemen benefit from lobbying in the US? What must be done?

The Arab American Institute has provided statistics of the ten states with the highest Arab American populations. California tops the list with 272,485,

Michigan is second with 191,607, and New York is third with 149,627. Pennsylvania numbers tenth on the list with 60,870 Arab Americans.

Population analysis based on Census Bureau data suggests the total Arab American population is nearly 2 million, though research by the Arab American Institute indicates that that number is a significant underestimate. The organization contends that the Arab American population is closer to 3.6 million.

This latter figure places the Arab American lobby on a similar scale in terms of population as the 5 to 8 million American Jews or the assessed 4.2 million NRA members.

About two percent of the total Arab American population is believed to be Yemeni. Data on the Yemeni diaspora living in the US is patchy, however. Five key Yemeni enclaves in the United States are located in Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and Washington DC. Over 11,500 Yemenis live in Michigan, specifically in the greater Detroit area, while an estimated total of 10,500 Yemenis live in the New York metropolitan area.

It is clear that 70,000 Yemenis at face

value cannot influence politics as effectively as 3.6 million Arab Americans or 4 million NRA members. However, as Yemen emerges from the ashes of the so-called Arab Spring and undergoes a socio-political transition, the potential benefit of utilizing Yemen's US-based diaspora should be considered within the broader mobilization of the Arab American lobby group.

The US has indicated strong support for Yemen and President Obama has recently made at least two important statements on Yemen.

Speaking at the US Military Academy Graduation Ceremony on May 18, 2014 he said:

"I am calling on Congress to support a new counter-terrorism partnership fund of up to \$5 billion which will allow us to train, build capacity, and facilitate partner countries in the front lines. These resources will give us flexibility to fulfill different missions, including training security forces in Yemen who have gone on the offensive against al-Qaeda."

In June 2014, he addressed the American people about the deteriorating situation in Iraq and presented Yemen as a

potential model for counter-terrorism, saying:

"... Yemen, [is] a very impoverished country and one that has its own sectarian or ethnic divisions. We do have a committed partner in President Hadi and his government. And we have been able to help develop their capabilities without putting large numbers of US troops on the ground ... in Yemen, for example, a wide-ranging national dialogue took time but helped to give people a sense that there is a legitimate political outlet for grievances that they may have."

The time is right for Yemenis—as an independent part of an aspirant Arab American lobby group—to organize and focus lobbying activities in support of development and continued American assistance. This should begin with appointing a lobby leader to garner support for the effort.

Moreover, it is necessary to get a better understanding of the Yemeni population in the US and to map it to congressional representative and senatorial boundaries to determine which officials can be influenced directly in support of Yemen.

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# How flawed are current aid responses?

**Kristy Siegfried**  
IRIN  
First Published July 15

Last week, international medical humanitarian organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) released a hard-hitting report “Where is everyone?” outlining a number of severe shortcomings in the international aid community’s response to humanitarian crises.

Many of the issues raised in the report are uncomfortably familiar to anyone working at the frontlines of emergency responses: funding systems are too slow and inflexible, negatively impacting response times; small, local NGOs that are often best placed to respond to emergencies are excluded from the predominantly Western-based, UN-centered humanitarian system; and emergency response capacity is not the priority it should be in a humanitarian system that has grown to take on many other functions.

Bertrand Taith, a cultural historian of humanitarian aid and director of the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute at the University of Manchester, has suggested that the report is short on evidence and questioned whether MSF’s “headline grabbing” critique of well-worn concerns was the best approach “in an era when austerity is deployed throughout the world as the excuse to restrict aid budgets.”

However, Ed Schenkenberg, chief executive of DARA, an NGO that evaluates the efficacy of humanitarian responses, countered that while the methodology behind MSF’s report could have been stronger, “overall, they’re asking the right questions... Over the last 10 years, we’ve seen a huge increase in the number of actors and a huge effort to professionalize the sector, and when you look at those developments, I think it is very valid to ask what the outcomes are for people affected [by humanitarian crises],” he told IRIN.

So what are the key issues that the report raises and how has the aid community responded to them? IRIN takes a look.

**Ever larger budgets have not led to more effective responses**  
The report begins with the assertion that “the international humanitarian aid system has more means and resources at its disposal... than ever before” and later notes that insufficiency of financing was not identified as a major constraint in any of the three case studies of emergency responses reviewed for the report (in South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Jordan), all of which were described as having major failings.

In an email to IRIN, Greg Barrow, director of the UN World Food Programme’s London office, responded that while the humanitarian community might have more resources at its disposal, “the scale, complexity and cost of responding to humanitarian emergencies is undoubtedly increasing.”

Simultaneous, large-scale displacements in countries including Syria, Iraq, Central African Republic and South Sudan, are putting an unprecedented strain on the international humanitarian system and, according to Jens Laerke, a spokesperson with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), a “lack of funds continues to constrain humanitarian operations around the world.”

Wendy Fenton of the Overseas Development Institute’s Humanitarian Policy Group pointed out that while aid agencies may face funding constraints, “agencies have choices about how they operate and what they prioritize.” MSF’s main contention is that they often fail to prioritize emergency response capacity which the authors describe as the humanitarian system’s “core business.”

Augustin Augier, head of ALIMA, a French NGO that focuses on partnering with local actors to provide

medical care in emergencies, agreed that emergency responses are not being sufficiently prioritized but blamed the overall humanitarian system rather than individual agencies.

“The system doesn’t provide enough incentive for local NGOs to develop strong humanitarian experience,” he told IRIN. “They all want to do development because you can get longer contracts that allow you to invest in infrastructure. They all say that from a business perspective, the incentives in the humanitarian system are not good enough for emergency response.”

From 2009 to 2013, local and national NGOs received 1.6 percent of the total aid given to NGOs as reported through OCHA’s Financial Tracking System. This represented 0.2 percent of the total international humanitarian response over the period, according to Development Initiatives research.

**Aid agencies are risk-averse**  
Perhaps the most damning finding in the report is that agencies are shying away from targeting the most hard-to-reach and therefore vulnerable populations, such as unregistered urban refugees in Jordan and internally displaced people living far from North Kivu’s provincial capital of Goma.

In all three emergencies looked at for the report, write the authors, “a principal determinant of the level of coverage and effectiveness was the level of difficulty (and conversely, convenience).”

The report cites insecurity and logistical challenges as factors that can restrict access to populations in places such as North Kivu and South Sudan, but suggests that often not enough is done to overcome these constraints.

“We’re not saying [agencies] should take unnecessary risks, but we do feel that in some cases, a perceived lack of security becomes a rather defensive argument,” said



Aid workers fill bags of fortified cereal for new arrivals to the Mugunga camp in eastern DR Congo

Jens Pedersen, a humanitarian affairs adviser with MSF based in Johannesburg. “It can be addressed through negotiation with parties.”

Some aid community insiders have taken offence at the implication, not just in the title of the report but also in its conclusions, that aid agencies—with the possible exception of MSF—are largely absent from many of the hardest-to-reach places.

In a blog entitled “Where is everyone? We’re standing right next to you,” Bob Kitchen, director of the International Rescue Committee’s emergency preparedness and response unit, pointed out that the IRC was among many other aid groups that “continue to stand and deliver in the face of chaos and mounting humanitarian needs” in places like Somalia, “a country so violent that MSF itself has withdrawn.”

Augier of ALIMA noted that operating in the most hard-to-reach

places comes at “a huge cost” that is not taken into sufficient consideration by donors. “I would not accuse the NGOs but look at the reasons why they can’t go to these places,” he said.

**The UN is at the core of many of the system’s dysfunctions**

The report claims that the triple role of lead UN agencies like UNHCR as coordinator, implementer, and donor in places like South Sudan leads to conflicts of interest. “I think that’s problematic in the sense that there’s an incentive for there not being enough critical questioning,” explained Pedersen. In the South Sudan case, for example, where UNHCR was responsible for disbursing funds to implementing partner agencies as well as being an implementer itself, those agencies were reluctant to raise concerns about problems with implementation, “not wanting to bite the hand that feeds it,” said

Pedersen. Arianne Rummery, a spokesperson with UNHCR, said the agency would look at MSF’s criticisms and “see what learning could be drawn from them.” She noted, however, that “the key findings of the report are over a year old (the interviews and data and site visits are from 2012 and 2013) and the considerable time gap between research and publication may not do justice to the efforts made to address the challenges in the three situations of the report.”

Fenton of ODI agreed that some positive steps have been taken since the report’s research was conducted. “There have been developments since these were done, although many problems are being replicated in places like Central Africa Republic,” she told IRIN.

“A system as big as the UN takes a long time to turn around.”

*Continued on the back page*

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

## How flawed are current aid responses?

**Funding systems are too slow and cumbersome to respond to emergencies**

"Emergency response requires flexible, rapidly disburseable and un-earmarked funding to be effective,"

notes the report, adding that current emergency funding mechanisms fail to provide this, often taking as long as three months to reach the field.

Augier confirmed that three months was typical for the majority

of donor funding which is disbursed through UN agencies. "We lose a lot of time because of this," he said, adding that donors were partly to blame for channeling the majority of humanitarian funding through the

UN rather than to individual NGOs.

Outside the UN system is the START Network, a consortium of 19 major NGOs which share a dedicated pot of emergency funding (the Start Fund), donated by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The Fund, launched in April 2014, aims to address gaps in fast responses to rapid-onset crises as well as responses to small and medium-scale emergencies that often receive little funding.

"The Start Network is an important and interesting development because until this came about and some donors decided to invest in it, there was no alternative to the UN in terms of managing large amounts of pooled funding," said Fenton.

The Network also seeks to address another of the criticisms raised by the MSF report—that small, local NGOs are often sidelined in emergency responses by the big, international agencies. One of the aims of the Start Network is to grow the capacity of these local actors and involve them more in decision-making.

### Moving the debate forward

The report does not end with a long list of recommendations and MSF has made it clear that it is intended as a trigger for critical discussions in the aid community rather than as an attempt to provide any easy answers. Whatever the views about how MSF has presented some of its findings, there appears to be widespread agreement that there is a need for such discussions, particularly at a time when so many pressing emergencies require urgent humanitarian responses.

Who will take responsibility for moving the debate forward is less clear. Schenkenberg of DARA argued that, having raised these critical issues, MSF has a responsibility to "invest in a process that would give organizations the time to engage more deeply." But both he and Augier also called on UN agencies to participate in more open discussions of their shortcomings.

"I think more or less everybody agrees that we should do more and we should do better, but the solutions can only come from the people who have the power to implement them and that's the UN and the big donors," said Augier.

Further debate is likely to take

place as aid agencies prepare for the World Humanitarian Summit, due to take place in Istanbul in 2016. One of the stated aims of the summit, which will be convened by the UN Secretary-General, is to find ways of making humanitarian aid more effective. Regional and online consultations have already started taking place to help identify some

of the humanitarian challenges that will be tackled.

"I think what MSF has done is put some old issues back on the table to highlight the need to try to address them, maybe at the World Humanitarian Summit," said Fenton.

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