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Standoff continues over position of SSF commander in Aden

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

SANA'A, March 8—Adlan Saleh Al-Hattas was appointed commander of Special Security Forces (SSF) in Aden governorate on Sunday. He was chosen by Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi in place of Thabet Muthanna Yahya Naji Jawas, whose nomination was rejected days earlier by the current SSF commander in Aden and his supporters.

The move to replace current commander Abdulhazef Mohammad Al-Saqqaf, who refuses to step down, has led to heightened tensions in the governorate since Thursday. Residents living near the SSF camp in Khour Maksar district vacated the area on Saturday and Sunday, fearing clashes between its soldiers and members of southern popular committees who support Hadi.

Residents left the area after security forces began closing roads leading to their camp and cutting electricity in the surrounding neighborhoods of Al-Arish and Al-Nasr, according to Helal Al-Hassani, a security officer based in Khour

Maksar.

According to a member of the SSF based in Sana'a city, who spoke to the Yemen Times on condition of anonymity, Al-Saqqaf's removal is illegitimate on a number of grounds. He said the SSF has not recognized Hadi's authority as president and that the Houthis, who have controlled the SSF since October, are opposed to the commander's replacement.

Hadi had nominated Jawas for the position on March 3, and appointed Al-Saqqaf to a new position as under-secretary of the Vital Status and Civil Registration Authority in Aden.

The new selection of Al-Hattas, seen as a compromise following opposition to Jawas' nomination, came following negotiations between Hadi and the national head of the SSF, Abdulrazzaq Al-Marwani, who was appointed by Hadi in November of last year and is considered by many to be a Houthi sympathizer.

Abdulrahman Anis, editor-in-chief of the October 14 newspaper

who is based in Khour Maksar, said tensions remained high in the area. "There are major security concerns, we've seen tanks and soldiers stationed around the camp and electricity remains cut off from surrounding areas," he said, adding that local residents are worried the conflict in Sana'a risks spilling over into Aden.

Southern popular committee members have threatened to force Al-Saqqaf out of the camp if he does not comply with Hadi's orders. Mohammad Herhaj, a popular committee leader in Aden, said Al-Saqqaf's refusal to comply was tantamount to rebellion and that his forces were prepared to attack the base if all other options are exhausted.

Heraj said Hadi's decision to appoint Al-Hattas in place of Jawas was an attempt to "avoid bloodshed" and that Al-Saqqaf is "following the Houthis and Ali Abdullah Saleh."

The popular committees in Aden are comprised of armed civilians, many of them from Hadi's home governorate of Abyan, and are led

by Hadi Mansour Hadi, brother to the ousted president.

Radfan Al-Dubais, the spokesperson for Southern Movement protesters in Aden's Al-Arood Square, said followers remain impartial to the standoff and would not be taking sides because "both parties are enemies of the movement."

However, he added, "for now we think it is better to stand by Hadi's side and try to gain his support for our cause, to help us secede from the north."

Thabet Jawas is originally from Lahj governorate and became commander of the Ba Suhaib brigade following unification in 1991. He is known for his involvement in the first war in Sa'ada in 2004, and is accused by the Houthis of killing their founding member, Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi, in a cave in Maran Mountain on Sept. 10 of that year.

Jawas was head of the 15th Infantry Brigade in Sa'ada when the national uprising began in February of 2011, after which he was removed from power and forced into retire-



Hadi's appointment of Jawas (left) as commander of the SSF in Aden has been rejected by current commander Al-Saqqaf (right) and his supporters.

ment by former President Saleh.

Writing on his official Facebook page on March 4, Hussein Al-Ezzi, director of the Houthis' Foreign Relations Department, suggested Jawas' appointment would provide an opportunity for his group to seek redress for their leader's 2004 "murder."

Referring to him as a "felon and a fugitive," Al-Ezzi said Jawas "has been hiding from us, but today Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi has pre-

sented him to all the free and honorable men nationwide to pursue him to the fullest extent wherever he is and bring him to justice."

Brigadier-General Al-Saqqaf was appointed in 2013 during the restructuring of the national army, which Hadi initiated that year. According to the SSF source in Sana'a, Hadi wants to remove Al-Saqqaf over fears the commander remains loyal to former President Saleh and the Houthis.

State control in Abyan tested by AQAP assault

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

SANA'A, March 9—Members of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) managed to seize control of Al-Mahfad city in Abyan governorate on Monday morning, before being repelled by security forces and taking refuge in the district's surrounding mountains.

AQAP reported via its official twitter feed on Monday that it had taken "full control" of the city and had kidnapped four soldiers and killed two others belonging to the 39th Armored Brigade.

Abu Al-Bara Al-Abyani, an AQAP fighter based in Al-Mahfad district, said the assault began at 2:30 a.m. and was carried out on four fronts, allowing the group to take swift control of the city and encircle the brigade's base, which is located in the city center.

A Dushka heavy machine gun and two tanks from the brigade were also seized in the fighting, according to local sources, one of which was used to shell the brigade's base.

Al-Abyani told the Yemen Times early on Monday that his fighters had taken control of the city but that clashes were ongoing. He said "many" soldiers had died but that "we only saw the bodies of two of them," in addition to another four that were taken alive.

Saleh Al-Kazemi, a sheikh from Al-Mahfad district, confirmed early on Monday that militants from AQAP had taken control of the city as well as other villages in the district, and had set up their own checkpoints. He claimed the 39th Armored Brigade suffered "dozens" of casualties in the fighting.

Conflicting reports emerged later in the day. Yahya Al-Hassani, assistant operations director in the 39th Armored Brigade, confirmed that four of his soldiers had been kidnapped and another two killed,



Al-Mahfad city in Abyan fell under the control of AQAP militants on Monday morning, before being reclaimed by members of the 39th Armored Brigade.

but said the city remained under their control.

Bashir Muhammad Ali, a southern popular committee member who lives in the area, told the Yemen Times on Monday evening that AQAP forces had retreated to their mountain bases and no longer held a presence in the city.

Although AQAP has been besieging the brigade from their mountain refuge for close to two weeks, Monday's casualties were the first to be reported. Al-Hassani said his men were struggling to cope as AQAP fighters had cut off access and essential supplies to the base, such as propane gas. Soldiers have been logging and gathering firewood as a result, he said.

The 39th Armored Brigade is part of the Fourth Military Com-

mand, which includes the governorates of Taiz, Aden, Lahj and Abyan. Previously based in Aden, the brigade was relocated to Abyan's Al-Mahfad district in 2014 to provide reinforcement against AQAP forces in the area.

Fahd Mohammad, an officer in the command's Abyan branch, said the brigade's forces were holding their ground and that reinforcements are not expected.

Considered an AQAP stronghold, the group's fighters were forced out of Al-Mahfad district in 2012 only to reemerge in 2013. A month-long campaign in 2014 depleted their numbers in the area but failed to dislodge them, leaving its fighters to wage a protracted guerrilla struggle from mountain bases since.

New Supreme Security head appointed after Al-Subaihi's escape

■ Bassam Al-Khameri

SANA'A, March 9—Jalal Al-Rowaishan has been appointed head of the Supreme Security Committee following the escape of acting Defense Minister Mahmoud Al-Subaihi to Lahj governorate on Saturday.

Al-Subaihi was appointed by Houthis to lead the committee following the group's constitutional declaration on Feb. 6, a post that had been filled by Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi until his resignation as president in January.

The Supreme Security Committee convened its first meeting with Al-Rowaishan as head on Sunday evening. In a statement released afterwards, members of the committee said they had reached several new decisions in line with security developments in the country, none of which were disclosed.

The statement included a clause reaffirming the Security Committee as "the representative of the constitutional legitimacy" and that "all military and security personnel should abide by its orders."

According to Mohammad Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthi Political Office, as of Monday afternoon no decision had been made to replace Al-Subaihi as acting Minister of Defense, although he said a decision from the Houthi Revolutionary Committee would be forthcoming.

Al-Subaihi left Sana'a to the southern governorate of Lahj on Saturday. Amid reports he had fled house arrest to Aden, Al-Subaihi himself, in addition to sources from the Aden Security Department, the Houthi Political Office, and senior Southern Movement leadership, confirmed he is in his home governorate of Lahj.

Al-Subaihi was placed under house arrest with other ministers following the government's resig-



Al-Subaihi (right) with Ahmed Al-Majedi, the governor of Lahj. Contrary to reports, the acting defense minister did not travel to Aden.

nation on Jan. 22, but was released following his appointment as acting

Minister of Defense.

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JMP continues protest in Ibb



Heads of the JMP in Ibb gathering for a protest in front of the city's security headquarters.

■ Khalid Al-Karimi

SANA'A, March 9—Heads of the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) in Ibb have been protesting since Sunday in Ibb city, Ibb governorate, calling for the release of seven of their members detained by the Houthis.

"This protest is part of our peaceful escalating measures to fulfill our demands," said Abdulkarim Al-Nuzaili, head of the Executive Body of the JMP in Ibb. The protests are being held in the vicinity of the Security Department headquarters, which was chosen "in order to make the security department in Ibb step in and take action to release our kidnapped members," Al-Nuzaili said.

Ibb city has witnessed a series of marches in recent weeks, calling for the evacuation of Houthi militants from the city and asserting the legitimacy of Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi as president. The latest march in Ibb city was on Saturday. During the march, the Houthis kidnapped four activists belonging to the JMP, according to Al-Nuzaili.

"So far, seven members of the JMP are in Houthi jails in Ibb. On Saturday alone the Houthi group

kidnapped four activists including Ahmed Ali Abdullatif, the head of the 2011 Revolutionary Committee in Ibb, Hisham Hadi, a journalist working for Suhail TV, Mohammad Al-Shami, the head of the Islah branch in Hubaish district of Ibb and Abdulsalam Al-Qadi, an activist," said Al-Nuzaili.

"Expression of opinion has become costly, and the Houthi group has been cracking down on those opposing it in Ibb city. This situation made the Executive Body of the JMP choose this way to hammer their message out," he added.

The JMP includes the Islah, Socialist and Nasserist parties. It was the main opposition to the General People's Congress, which ruled Yemen for decades until the Houthis took power.

According to Khaled Mohammad Hisham, the secretary of the Nasserist Party in Ibb and a participant in the ongoing protest, "This protest is a collective effort and all the JMP heads in Ibb city are taking part. The sole problem is that we are dealing with an armed group which uses force as the only means to communicate."

Nasser Al-Arjli, a member of the Houthi Revolutionary Committee in Ibb, told the Yemen Times

Monday morning that Hisham Hadi and Ahmed Abdullatif will be released later the same day.

"We are releasing anyone proven innocent. Those who remain in custody were involved in sparking sectarian and ideological disputes. So they will not be released," he said.

As of 5 p.m. Monday the two men had yet to be released.

Mohammad Al-Shami, the security director of Ibb, told the Yemen Times the local authorities in Ibb are only playing the role of mediator—those kidnapped by the Houthis are not being held in government facilities and are not being tried by the judiciary.

Al-Shami said he is in contact with Houthis in Ibb to secure the release of the JMP members.

According to Nasserist Party secretary Hisham, the Ibb Security Department promised to discuss the release of the JMP members with the Houthis, a promise he calls "unfulfilling."

"We told them we are political parties and have the right to demonstrate. If they have charges against our members, they can refer them to the prosecution or any other official authority, not throw them behind bars indefinitely."

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New Supreme Security head appointed after Al-Subaihi's escape

"Al-Subaihi is an acting minister and he was performing his job normally without being under house arrest," said Al-Bukhaiti, although he termed the minister's move to Lahj an "escape" because the Houthis are not allowing ministers to leave the capital and have already prevented some from doing so.

Al-Bukhaiti said the Houthis were unaware Al-Subaihi had left Sana'a "until his guards and others began to loot his house."

In a statement made Sunday afternoon to Aden's Al-Ghad Newspaper, Al-Subaihi said he left Sana'a on Saturday at noon in coordination with contacts from Marib governorate.

"I took the Sana'a-Marib highway and arrived in Marib in the afternoon while convoys of my security escorts took the Sana'a-Hodeida highway and another took the Sana'a-Dhamar route to mislead the Houthis," he said, adding that he eventually arrived in Lahj via Shabwa governorate.

A senior security source in the Aden Security Department, speaking to the Yemen Times on condition of anonymity, said that five of Al-Subaihi's decoy escorts were killed in an ambush Houthi militants in Al-Khukha city in the west of Hodeida governorate.

Al-Subaihi confirmed the assault, but said only one of his escorts was injured, a man named Jaber Hanash.

Al-Subaihi is originally from the Al-Madhareba district of Lahj. He led the Fourth Military Command before being appointed Minister of Defense on Nov. 7, 2014.

Mohammad Al-Maslami, a leading figure in the Southern Movement, told the Yemen Times Al-Subaihi's arrival in the south may have repercussions within the military given his previous position and that he may still hold loyalty within its ranks.

"Al-Subaihi is still at home in Lahj and hasn't yet arrived in Aden. We don't know what his plans are and what he has planned for the south but everything will be clear soon," Al-Maslami added.

Attacks continue unabated in Al-Baida



Tribesmen gathered in Al-Baida city in November 2014 in a show of solidarity with residents of Qaifa district.

■ Ali Abulohom

SANA'A, March 9—Dozens of Houthi militants were reportedly killed on Sunday in clashes between tribesmen, allegedly backed by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and Houthis in the Qaifa and Dhi Naem districts of Al-Baida governorate.

A senior source from the Security Department in Al-Baida city, speaking to the Yemen Times on condition of anonymity, said the areas of Al-Zawb and Homat Sarar in Qaifa district witnessed fighting that left at least 13 Houthis killed in Al-Zawb and another seven in Homat Sarar.

The clashes lasted several hours until midnight, according to the source, who was unable to confirm any casualties on the side of the tribesmen.

Yahya Abu Ali, a Houthi fighter in Al-Baida city, said his group was attacked by AQAP militants backed by tribesmen from Qaifa district. He said dozens were killed from both sides, dismissing claims that Houthis accounted for the majority of casualties.

Nasser Al-Hariri, a resident of Homat Sarar and member of the tribe of the same name, said tribesmen attacked Houthi militants in both Homat Sarar and Al-Zawb villages. The clashes lasted several hours before the tribesmen pulled their fighters back. He was unable to confirm the number of casualties on his side.

In a separate incident, tribesmen allegedly supported by AQAP attacked a Houthi checkpoint in Dhi Naem early on Sunday, leaving six Houthis dead and three others wounded. Two tribesmen were killed, according to the security source in Al-Baida.

AQAP claimed responsibility for both attacks in the districts of Dhi Naem and Qaifa. The group said 15 Houthis were killed in Dhi Naem, but did not provide any figures for the clashes in Qaifa.

Additional attacks were reported in the area on Monday. According to Fahd Al-Tawee, a locally-based journalist, a military vehicle belonging to Houthis was targeted by tribesmen in Al-Baida city on Monday, with no casualties reported.

Mounting tensions in Al-Baida

governorate between Houthis and tribesmen allegedly supported by AQAP have continued since the former's advance into the governorate in late October of 2014 under the pretext of pursuing AQAP militants.

Since then, Houthi forces have taken over several districts in the east of the governorate, where they first arrived from Dhamar governorate. These districts include Ra'ada, Qaifa, and Al-Manaseh, which the group took after deadly clashes that left dozens killed and injured from both sides.

Al-Baida city was captured by the group on Feb. 10, two days after they took over the districts of Dhi Naem and Sharia.

Al-Zaher district, which borders Al-Baida city to the west, was entered by the Houthis on Feb. 17 following a deal brokered by the governorate's security chief allowing Houthis to pursue AQAP in the district. However, Al-Zaher has witnessed tension between Houthis and tribesmen due to the prolonged presence of Houthis in the district and alleged violations of the agreement.

Houthis continue martyrs celebrations following attack in Marib

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

SANA'A, March 9—Nine were killed and two others injured during an attack on Houthi supporters in Marib city on Sunday. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) claimed responsibility for the assault, which came as Houthis were attending an event to commemorate the group's martyrs.

Fighting erupted when AQAP supporters from the Aal Marwan tribe opened fire on a checkpoint manned by Houthis belonging to the Al-Ashraf tribe, both of which are local to Marib governorate. The latter were guarding the entrance to a photo exhibition commemorating martyrs from the wars in Sa'ada governorate, as part of an annual "Martyrs Week" organized by the Houthis.

Mohammad Al-Jedasi, a locally-based journalist, said RPGs and 50 caliber machine guns were used in the attack. He said men from Aal Marwan tribe arrived in several cars and attacked a checkpoint located at the entrance of Marib's old city, set up near to the exhibition.

Abdulmalek Al-Ujaili, a member of the Houthi Political Office, said those manning the checkpoint were assisted by armed men guarding the exhibit's entrance to repel the attackers. The clashes left three dead on either side while another two men belonging to Aal Marwan were captured, he said.

Speaking with the Yemen Times,



The Houthis' annual Martyrs Week began on Thursday to commemorate those who have died fighting for the group's cause.

an AQAP source who goes by name Abdu Al-Turab Al-Maribi confirmed that his group was behind the attack.

Events are being organized throughout the country for Martyrs Week as Houthis gather to commemorate those who have died in their armed rebellion. Running for the seventh consecutive year, seminars, art exhibits and other activities are being held in a dozen governorates.

An estimated 6,531 members of the group died in six rounds of

war fought with the former regime between 2004 and 2010. Martyrs Week was launched on March 5 in the capital Sana'a, where the families of victims, government officials, journalists and members of the public have been gathering in large numbers.

The opening exhibition includes installments showcasing the 1994 civil war and the victims of Al-Qaeda bombings in Yemen over the previous five years. Another focus is on the suffering endured by Palestinians under Israeli occupation.

ISIL brochures distributed in Hadramout and Lahj AQAP: Houthi expansion driving some AQAP supporters into ISIL's arms

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

Fear and worry abound in the governorates of Hadramout and Lahj following the distribution of brochures in those governorates by armed men declaring the establishment of the Islamic State (ISIL). The brochures announce that ISIL in Hadramout and Lahj will fight the Houthis, and who have already taken over large swathes of the north of the country and have ambitions to keep expanding.

An Al-Qaeda operative told the Yemen Times on condition of anonymity that it was Al-Qaeda affiliates who have pledged allegiance to ISIL who distributed the brochures and that an ISIL branch will be established in Yemen, "very soon."

Another Al-Qaeda operative who goes by the name Abdu Al-Laith Al-Yemani, told the Yemen Times that the brochures are a reaction to the "war being waged against Sunnis" in Al-Baida governorate, but denied that Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was behind their distribution.

"It is true that there are [AQAP] members who are announcing their support of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, but they represent themselves and don't speak for the group."

Salim Al-Sar, a journalist based in Al-Huta, Lahj, said that the chaos in the governorate as a result of conflict between tribesmen aligned with the Southern Movement and military forces stationed in the governorate since January is pushing Al-Qaeda to increase recruitment efforts. "They're exploiting the chaos

to recruit young men through sermons, religious gathering and brochures," Al-Sar said.

"We saw armed men riding motorcycles distribute brochures to people on the street that contained threats to the Houthis, the army, and anyone who cooperates with them," he added.

Omar Al-Ghazi, an officer in Lahj's Operations Department, confirmed the distribution of the leaflets.

Salah Abdu Yahya Jahzer, a freelance journalist specialized in armed groups' affairs in Yemen, said that AQAP will exploit the Houthi expansion to draw recruits, and may even pledge allegiance to ISIL, despite disagreements between the two groups over certain tactics.

In Hadramout, the brochures were distributed in Seyoun, Al-Qat-tan, Mukalla and other districts.

The Yemen Times obtained two of those brochures.

One brochure announced that it was, "A declaration from ISIL soldiers in Yemen. [We] bear greetings and ridings, as well as serious warnings... for the non-believers."

"We say to the Sunnis in Yemen, no matter the harm that befalls you from the Houthis or the Houthified Yemeni army, victory is for Islam, Oh Sunnis of Yemen, your blood is our blood, your families are our families, advocating for you is our duty, we will not leave you as easy prey for the Houthis," the brochure continued.

Another brochure told readers to, "Be assured that your blood that was shed, your sons' agony, your families that became homeless, all

this will not go unanswered, our promises are not merely ink on paper, in the coming days you will see what brings joy to your souls, the killings of the Sunnis' enemies in Iraq and Syria will be repeated in Yemen sooner [rather] than later."

The brochure says it was published on behalf of the Islamic State in the Emirate of Hadramout.

Mohammed Bahadad, a resident in Seyoun city, saw men passing out brochures.

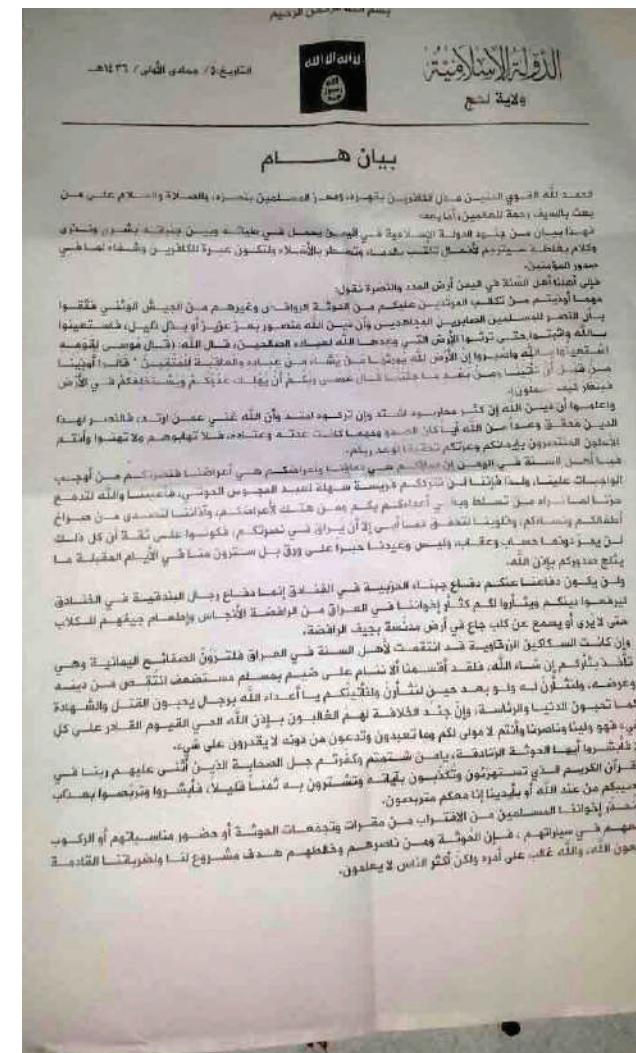
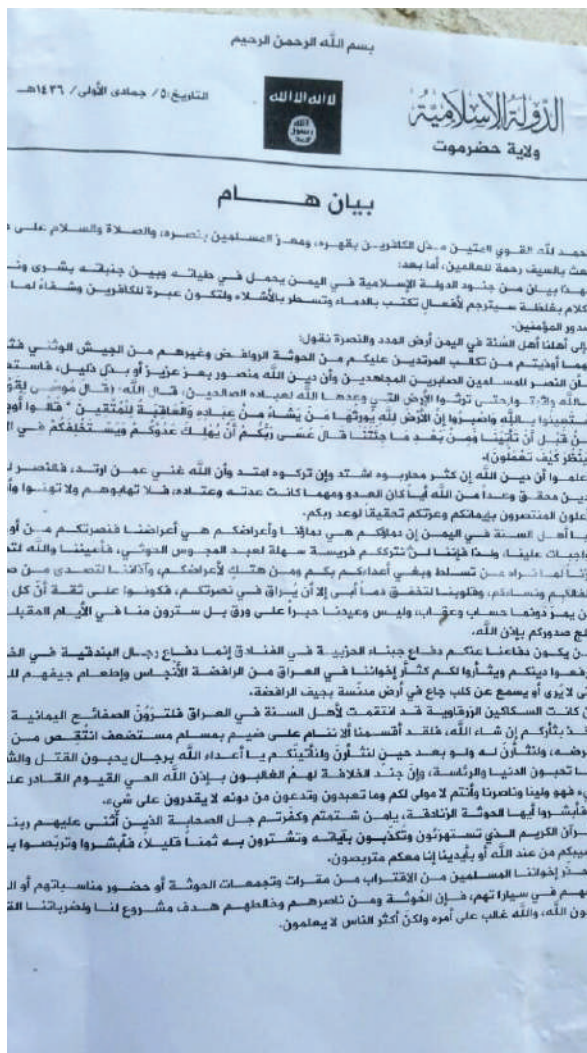
"There were five men armed with kalashnikovs. They distributed the brochures at mosques, homes and markets. The residents here are afraid."

In Lahj governorate, residents say dozens of armed men distributed the brochures on the first and second of March

The content of the brochures distributed in Lahj is nearly identical to those distributed in Hadramout, with the exception of referring to Lahj as the "Emirate of Lahj."

As conflicts continue to break out between the Houthis and tribesmen in Al-Baida—who are allegedly backed by Al-Qaeda, and as tribes in Marib prepare to fight the Houthis should they expand into the governorate, Al-Qaeda is being strengthened.

The Houthis already refer to not just Al-Qaeda, but Sunni tribes and even left-wing critics as "Daesh," and the distribution of the leaflets



Copies of the brochures handed out in Lahj and Hadramout were obtained by the Yemen Times. The brochures, referring to the two governorates as "emirates," claims that ISIL will fight the Houthis in Yemen.

could serve as another excuse for the group to expand.

A Houthi leader in Dhamar governorate, Abdu Al-Wishali, told the Yemen Times that the group has

been warning against the arrival of ISIL to Yemen for months.

"And here are signs that they are coming," he said.

"It is our duty to fight [Daesh] in

every corner of Yemen. We will not stand by quietly as our citizens are beheaded. The popular committees will expand to all governorates in Yemen to fight them," he added.

VOX POP

What is a woman's role in society?

Yemen Times Staff

May 8 was International Women's Day. The Yemen Times asked citizens what place women have in Yemeni society today and what people think women's role should and could be in the future. The Yemen Times asked the following questions:

1. A woman's place is inside the house. Do you agree or disagree with that statement?
2. Who is the most influential woman in your life and why?
3. Is a woman capable of running the country?



Mohammad Hussein Nasher, 25 years old, gas station manager

1. A woman's role is not exclusively in the house, she can work inside and outside the house.
2. The best woman in my life is my mother, because she is my mother. What can I say?
3. Women can run the country, and we can have a female president. Why not?



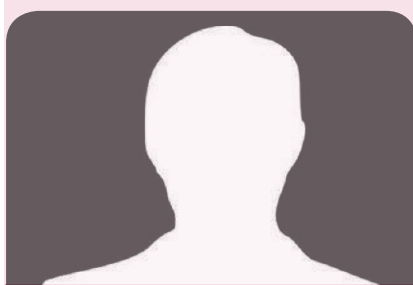
Um Abdulaziz, 37 years old, Azal Finance, affiliated with the GPC

1. A woman can work inside the house, but also outside of it.
2. The best woman in my view is a woman who is organized and who can manage everything successfully: Meals, children, sleeping time, and if they work outside the home, balance home and work life.
3. A woman can not lead a country because she has responsibilities towards her children. If she is very organized, however, she can do it.



Samr Yasin Al-Ariqi, 26 years old, private sector

1. A woman's role is inside the house. If she is married and has a husband to support her she does not need to work.
2. The best woman in my life is my mother because she raised me and supported me.
3. Of course. Women can lead and become president. I know this because at school, girls out-perform boys.



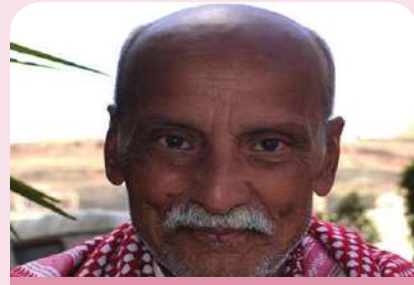
Hussam Mohammad, A member of AQAP

1. It's in the Holy Quran, when Allah (the glorified and exalted) ordered Muslim women to stay at home unless there's an emergency situation or a necessary task to do. Also, the Prophet Mohammad said that it is not good for women to keep going out and in for nothing important. The last thing is that it's essential for women to spend much of their time at home to get their job done perfectly as a mothers or wives, and they can count on men to do the hard jobs outside.
2. It is my mom, my queen.
3. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said that a nation that puts a woman as its leader will not be a successful nation.



Mesk Hamoud, 40 years old, cleaner

1. A woman's role is not limited to any single space.
2. The best woman in my life is my mother. Why? Isn't it obvious that everyone loves their mothers?
3. An educated woman is capable of running a country.



Mohammad Al-Refaiee, 65 years old, journalist and writer

1. I believe that a woman is a man's partner in every aspect of life. Women are vital and active in this life, why would we confine women in houses? They have proven themselves to be active members of society and in many fields. She has a role of helping to raise her children, but so do men.
2. The best woman in my life is my mother, because she is priceless. She is life itself. As for my wife, I love her too, one must respect one's wife as a life partner. But no woman can compete with one's mother.
3. A woman can lead a country, she is a mother, a father and society itself. She has already demonstrated this. Who ruled Yemen in the past? Many Yemeni women such as Bilqis, Arwa and Bint Al-Sulaihi.

Afghan women's progress trumped by donors' priorities

Seema Ghani
aljazeera.com
First published March 8

Economic empowerment of Afghan women has been a mantra of the international community involved in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban at the end of 2001. Thirteen years on, while progress in Afghan women's predicament is undeniable, the ambitious objective of economic empowerment of women leaves much to be desired.

The latest US scheme, under the name PROMOTE, was announced late last year as a comprehensive package of assistance to the tune of \$216 million for Afghan women. The US government is lobbying other western donors to also contribute funds to the same program. This money will be disbursed in four areas: Leadership development, economic empowerment, governance, and strengthening civil society.

A main challenge in Afghanistan is the mentality of men, wherein they will assume that with this large amount of funds coming in for Afghan women, there is no need for gender-sensitizing programs elsewhere. It happened when in the first Bonn meeting in 2001, the Ministry of Women Affairs was established.

Mentality of men

At the beginning, almost everyone was happy because it appeared the women of the country were recognized through the establishment of this ministry. It was a positive gesture after years of the Taliban's oppression of women. Slowly this ministry turned into an obstacle in the life of women in the country. There were and still are complaints that when a woman reaches out to legal institutions for her rights, she is told to go to "her own ministry." The legal institutions are always managed by men and usually by those who don't believe in women's rights.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs and the rest of the government have not been able to monitor the implementation of good policies to ensure that women's needs are met. Women's contribution to the country's economy is still unaccounted for. Many NGOs receive funds from donors to carry out training and after a few months the women receive certificates. There was nothing else done beyond the certificate.

Women still do not have access to raw materials or appropriate financing due to the high rates of interest or lack of guarantees. While men make money through trade and import, women must produce and with little infrastructure facilities,

women can not become successful businesswomen. Quantity has normally been the focus for the donors rather than quality.

As for the leadership component, the worry is that PROMOTE will continue the previous programs of training women but not push the government for appointments at senior levels. Unless women take part at the decision-making level, no change will come to the lives of women and girls.

Under such domestic conditions Afghan women are worried about the effectiveness of the \$216 million that will be disbursed in their name.

There are other concerns, too. The experience of the past decade has shown a mostly donor-driven approach to projects for women. Needs assessment has mostly been flawed and superficial. The assessments are usually done by foreign consultants with almost no experience in Afghanistan and primarily based on preconceived donors program designs.

Donors' wishes

When projects are outsourced to local NGOs for implementation, often the NGO follows the wishes of the donor regardless of the needs of the country, possible duplication or ineffectiveness of the project. The community of NGOs

that have been created in the last two decades are the implementing partners of international donors.

The culture of NGO-ism, which has been encouraged to flourish by the donors, may have provided an easy vehicle for donors' projects, but at the cost of a still underdeveloped private sector. Foreign aid will not last forever. With its reduction, NGOs will also collapse. Private sector development, therefore, must slowly take over for real economic development to take place.

Afghanistan's donor countries want quick results and instant gratification for the funds they disburse. But only long-term plans can achieve sustainable success. Therefore, the future sustainability of Afghan women's progress—and indeed, Afghanistan's progress—depends on fundamental improvements on aid effectiveness.

During PROMOTE's assessment process earlier in 2015, women were called on at their own offices occasionally for consultation. Most other consultations with Afghan women were held at the famous Barons Hotel in Kabul, a hotel popular among expat consultants with suites costing up to \$20,000 per month.

Afghans were told that due to security threats in the city, the PROMOTE assessors had to meet

with women in the highly secure Barons Hotel. Some Afghan women refused to attend consultation meetings, realizing that despite claims of "lessons learned," PROMOTE was being launched along the same old pattern; donors using vast chunks of the funds pledged for Afghanistan to cover their own expenses.

PROMOTE is the responsibility of three US companies to implement. US contracts are always awarded to US companies. All the senior staff and consultants must also be Americans. Due to Afghanistan's precarious security situation, their salaries are double or triple what they would normally earn in their country. The expat housing and security measures also take a hefty sum out of the project money. As a result, a fraction of the original funds allocated for a program actually makes it to Afghanistan.

Gradual changes

Afghans have always hoped that at least 70 percent of the funds would be spent in their country. What actually happens is that only ten to 30 percent of the money goes to Afghans while the rest goes towards overhead costs.

All this is against the Paris Declaration and aid effectiveness agreements that donors had committed to. If there is to be any hope

for PROMOTE and other future programs for Afghan women, donors must start to make changes. One step could be to begin engaging with independent Afghan consultancy firms. By partnering with Afghan women-led consultancy firms instead of NGOs, projects can be monitored and evaluated independently, transparency and accountability can be assured and the Afghan private sector, especially women's businesses, can be promoted.

Already, a number of Afghan independent watchdog organizations have sprung up. Groups such as the Volunteer Movement of Anti-Corruption and Afghan Women's Charter in this country have started monitoring and reporting. But, monitoring and evaluation is the job of the private sector and donors should work with private sector companies to build their capacity and help them gain experience in handling larger projects. After all, one component of the PROMOTE project is economic empowerment of Afghan women.

Seema Ghani is a former deputy minister at Afghanistan's Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. She's also a founding member of the People's Anti-Corruption Movement and the Afghan Women Charter.

Changing oil from a curse into a blessing for the Arab world

Hafed Al-Ghwell
Atlantic Council
First published March 5

Over the last 100 years, the Arab world has been shaped and defined more by its oil resources and revenues than any other factor. From the early twentieth century up until the present time, the region has both breathed and bled oil. It has been responsible for almost all aspects of its social, economic, and political life. Both its international and domestic public policies have been singularly determined by the reserves, exports, and revenues of oil.

Economists have long known that natural resources have far more often been a curse than a blessing, particularly for the places that have discovered large reserves of oil. "The Dutch Disease," as it has been called, refers to the distortive effects of natural resources, primarily oil. These resources create an artificial bubble of prosperity through over-valued currencies and cheaper imports, driving out the local traditional industries and agriculture and focusing economic activity on exploiting natural resources, all of which makes diversifying the economy difficult.

Worse still, the state uses these revenues to subsidize basic foods, goods, and public services and to finance public expenditures, turning

the entire economic system into a welfare and entitlement state. This practice distorts the real value of work, products, and services. When states provide medical care, education, food, and electricity for free or at extremely low costs to all citizens, rich and poor alike, this creates an artificial system of costs and values. It turns the entire population into dependents who become entangled in an artificial, fairytale economy, where goods and services do not meet their true costs. These misrepresentations distort the foundations and incentives of public, and even private, institutions and turn them into empty shells dependent on largesse from above to survive, rather than providing real value and earning the public's trust.

Sadly, this bubble economy has largely plagued the Arab World to various degrees for at least sixty years. Even countries that do not have large reserves of oil, such as Egypt, Syria, and Yemen, have succumbed to the oil curse through low cost oil imports, grants, aid, and remittances from their own labor working in nearby, oil-rich countries.

Governments have so far followed only two real models through which they have managed to develop public policies that have mitigated the negative effects of the natural resource curse. Norway, for example, has developed a model of managing its oil revenues through an independent authority, tasked with

collecting and managing the funds generated from oil sales in a transparent and well-governed manner with specific objectives, such as investing the bulk of it in a "future generation fund" and financing the government budget for specific items. Alaska adopted the second model, whereby citizens of the state receive direct payments for part of the revenues that the state government receives from oil concessions. The remainder goes toward funding specific local government programs, which turn these funds into a taxable and spendable income for citizens rather than a tool to distort costs and values.

The Arab world, however, has neither adopted such examples nor developed a working model of its own. So far, most of the Arab countries provide guarantees for public employment and untargeted universal subsidies for a host of public services, such as education, medical care, electricity, and basic food-stuff. This is an unsustainable fiscal position in the long run, creating a grossly distorted, uncompetitive, wasteful, and corrupt economic dynamic, where the privileged and well-connected benefit excessively while the rest live on ever-decreasing opportunities and scrap.

Although many reasons drive the evolution of this economic structure, laced with its negative impact on the social and political frameworks in the region, the reasons behind the lack of serious reforms

remain simply and purely political.

The region views tampering with the status quo as political suicide. Any attempt to affect meaningful change can potentially trigger widespread anger and protests, leading to political revolutions that can topple governments. The widening circle of dependence by large segments of the population on cheaper albeit low quality food, energy, education, and medicine, coupled with a narrower and shallower pool of opportunities in the private sector for job prospects, has placed the political leadership between a rock and a hard place.

Of course, in addition to the Norwegian and Alaskan models, a number of well-tested policy options could deal with these issues in a measured, sequential, and peaceful way: Targeted cash-transfer subsidy programs, creating better business environments, improving educational systems to meet the demands of the private sector, more innovative human capacity building and youth employment programs, better resource management, transparent wealth distribution mechanisms, deeper economic integration among the Arab countries, and more efficient and targeted public expenditure and investment strategies. Unfortunately, the region still lacks the political courage to take advantage of them.

One possible policy option to test, at least, is to turn part of the oil revenues into income for citizens

through direct cash transfer instead of masking it as subsidies. This policy would put individuals in charge of their own money and reduce waste, corruption, and cost and value distortions in the economy. Carefully and strategically targeting such cash transfers to address specific sectors, economic activities, and income groups would create positive momentum that can have a multiplier effect across the whole economy.

The key to all of this entails enabling the political leadership to choose the right set of policies and enhancing their ability to communicate them effectively to their population in a credible and transparent manner, thereby generating the public trust needed to implement them.

In other words, there is an urgent need for strategic vision on the side of both the political leadership and the public at large. Each must realize the urgency of these issues and the need to implement economic policy to get ahead of the curve. Ignoring these systemic economic problems for much longer would only fuel frustration—particularly among the large youth population in the Arab world, estimated at nearly 65 percent of the population and who played a key role in the Arab uprisings of 2011—and result in having to deal with them as political revolutions or extremism.

Despite the political and academic considerations and debate, the Arab

economic framework as a whole and on the level of each country separately as it stands today needs a serious overhaul with dramatic reforms sooner rather than later. As countries like the United States move closer towards energy independence and as climate change concerns become more urgent in policy circles, the dramatic changes to the oil age will reduce the ability of Arab countries to continue their total and blind dependence on the revenues it generates. The choice before them is to adapt now on their own or be forced to later in spite of themselves.

The elastic band, between the economic reality of the region and its socio-political governance frameworks is reaching a breaking point. The added pressure of delayed reform, lower and lower oil revenues, and the lack of economic diversification and opportunity can only ensure that it will snap in violent and unpredictable ways sooner rather than later.

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What refugees really think of aid agencies

Louise Redvers
 IRIN
 First published March 5

Aid agencies are partial, unaccountable and potentially corrupt, and they fail to meet refugees' most pressing needs.

These are just some of the criticisms emerging from a series of new focus groups with refugees and others who receive aid across the Middle East.

Concerns included a lack of consultation about people's needs, a failure to protect the most vulnerable, confusion over which agency was responsible for what, duplicated aid, as well as instances where help was perceived to be withheld or prioritized due to political or religious affiliation.

"When you decide to help some-

"It is clear that people do not feel they are getting as much support as they want and that many organizations are not doing enough to communicate..."

one you have to remove all their affiliations and simply treat them as humans," noted one female youth leader from Palestine.

"Humanitarian organizations need to provide information about their services because it is not humane to respond to refugee information needs with 'I don't know,'" added a female refugee in Yemen.

The interviews conducted in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Yemen were commissioned by the organizers of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), ahead of this week's consultation for the Middle East and North Africa, held in the Dead Sea.

Reality check

"Some of the comments were quite damning and I think it is a bit of a reality check for the humanitarian system," said Reza Kasraï, Middle East and North African regional representative for the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), an NGO consortium, which conducted the focus groups in partnership with the WHS secretariat.

Details of the interviews—conducted between November 2014 and February 2015, with a mix of men, women, youth and community leaders—have been compiled in a report shared with aid organizations, donors and government officials attending the WHS meeting in Jordan and online.

The observations make uncomfortable reading for both national and international aid agencies operating in a region where large communities of Syrian, Iraqi and Palestinian refugees, as well as other migrants, are living in a mix of camp and community settings.

For a UN document, the stakeholder report is unusually candid,



A refugee in Lebanon describing her feelings towards aid agencies. Interviews commissioned for the World Humanitarian Summit have produced a damning review of aid agencies operating across the Middle East and North Africa.

but its tone reflects ongoing efforts by the WHS secretariat to promote dialogue around sensitive issues rarely openly discussed within the sector.

Using a ten-point scale (where ten = high and one = low), interviewees gave an average rating of three when asked if they thought aid groups were meeting their priority needs.

Asked if they were treated with respect and dignity, respondents across the five countries gave an average ranking of 3.5 out of ten; and the question of whether aid

organizations considered refugees' opinions received an average score of 2.5 out of ten.

Nadine Elshokeiry, a humanitarian affairs officer with the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (ROMENA) and who assisted with the focus groups, told IRIN: "It is clear that people do not feel they are getting as much support as they want and that many organizations are not doing enough to communicate with [the] affected populations they are trying to help."

But she added, "While there were some strong comments, we feel this is a very constructive criticism and it gives us something very useful to work on in terms of how the humanitarian system can improve its response."

In addition to the 35-page WHS report, IRIN has also been shown country-specific reports on the focus groups in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and Lebanon.

Accountability

Elshokeiry said the focus groups

had shown that many people didn't distinguish between different aid organizations—seeing them all as part of one wider system.

"Because there is not always clear information about who is doing what or where aid is coming from, especially where local partners or intermediaries are involved, I think this creates a perception of a lack of accountability," she said, noting a need for agencies to do more to communicate with the people they are trying to help.

Continued on back page



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Women at Monday's event said such gatherings and celebrations were important to remind each other that there are other women out there fighting for their craft and their rights. Photo by Maha Senan



This photo, by Yemeni-American photographer Rooj Al-Wazir, captures Yemeni women at work. Photo by Rooj Al-Wazir

Yemen celebrates female photographers on International Women's Day

■ Yemen Times Staff

With the closure of embassies and the country's few galleries, the prospects for finding a sponsor and host for an International Women's Day event were looking grim. Despite Yemen's serious political situation—the UN Envoy to Yemen has described Yemen as being on the “brink of civil war”—photographer and women's rights activist Bushra Al-Fusail made it happen.

“I said, ‘Fine. We’ll celebrate at a coffee shop. That’s where everyone gathers anyway.’”

She approached Nina Alaqa from the Dutch organization, SPARK, and the two women moved forward with their plans for a photo exhibit featuring the photography of Yemeni women.

SPARK sponsored by the event, which was attended by dozens of people and hosted at Coffee Corner Monday evening.

In the entrance, photos in black frames celebrating Yemeni women were displayed. The photos were by Al-Fusail, as well as Maha Senan, Arwa Al-Hubaishi and Rooj Al-Wazir.

“Supporting these initiatives is important because young people need a space to express themselves and be creative, especially during this chaos that the country is experiencing,” said Aqlan.

“These initiatives remind us that even when things are falling apart, there is still room to be expressive and to bring positive energy to shed light on what is hidden among the chaos: Like the amazing women we see in these pictures,” she added.

Al-Fusail says women are



Dozens of people attended Monday's event. Photo by Bushra Al-Fusail



Yemeni rapper Amani Yahya performs at the photo exhibit celebrating International Women's Day.



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uniquely positioned to capture the 50 percent of society that are less seen and heard from than their male counterparts.

When the photographer is a woman, the woman being photographed is more likely, “to be open with [her] problems,” Al-Fusail says.

She has noticed that while many women in Sana'a are outwardly reacting to the takeover of the capital by the Houthis by veiling their faces, she also sees the small acts of informal rebellion throughout the city.

“Three years ago, I would approach women on the streets and not find anyone willing to have their photo taken. Now, many women agree.”

While International Women's Day comes and goes once a year, the fight for women's rights in Yemen is a year-round struggle. Complicating that fight is the political turmoil of the country, as well as the well-intentioned liberals who tell Al-Fusail that now is not the time.

“Do not tell us that because of this stupid situation that we are in, that it's not the time to fight for our rights. There's no convenient time, we have to always be fighting.”

Alaqa fights the good fight

through SPARK by focusing on youth initiatives. “I really hope to see the younger generation come out of this strong and with constructive ideas.”

“For our generation, [some] of us can go abroad, we have other opportunities. But we need to be here and try as much as possible to remind people of what we can accomplish, even if things are really bad.”

One of those youth is Amani Yahya, a female rapper from Hodeida who performed at the International Women's Day event on Monday.

“When you know that there are other creative, artistic women it leaves you feeling inspired,” Yahya said. “It feels good to be part of this day with other women.”

The support reminds her she's not alone.

“I've gotten a lot of threats, people telling me to stop what I'm doing because I'm [projecting] a 'bad' image of Yemeni women. I'm not going to stop.”

Alaqa with her NGO; Al-Fusail with her photography; and Yahya with her music, are proud of the event they planned and performed at Monday, but for them, the fight for women's rights is more than a once-a-year event. Every day is Women's Day.

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What refugees really think of aid agencies

In OPT, accountability—or a perceived lack thereof—was a major complaint among those interviewed. Many accused international and national aid agencies of favoritism towards certain groups of people and expressed concerns about aid being subject to corruption.

“The participants’ biggest issue was the lack of accountability and transparency of humanitarian organizations,” the write-up noted. “This also raises participants’ suspicions of the possibility of corruption in humanitarian aid.”

And it adds, “There is a perception that project budgets are not spent appropriately, but are spent on high-visibility activities, such as repainting building walls and paying for media coverage. In Gaza, distributions are said to happen in schools or other places that will be covered by the international media.”

Although few aid organizations were identified by name, participants in the Palestinian focus group, study seen by IRIN, directly criticized UNRWA—the UN agency for Palestine refugees.

The criticisms included: A vague mandate; refusal to delegate responsibilities to other organizations; funding shortages that have affected quantity and quality of the services in schools and primary health clinics in camps; and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures and slow decision-making processes.

UNRWA spokesman Chris Gunness acknowledged agency services have been subject to “cutting and erosion” but he told IRIN, “Going

back to the 1950s, UNRWA has had a significant budget deficit year on year and this has had an impact on everything: Buildings and infrastructure are crumbling, computer services taken for granted in most organizations are just not there, the list goes on.”

“When you decide to help someone you have to remove all their affiliations and simply treat them as humans.”

And he added, “Alongside the austerity brought on by the funding gap, our major departments have undergone root and branch reform which has led to deficiencies and this much is widely acknowledged by our donors.”

Who is the priority?

The perception that humanitarian organizations prioritized donors’

views over those of affected populations was a recurring theme in several of the focus groups.

“Given the fact that Palestine is under occupation and there are chronic problems in Gaza, donors and organizations are still unable to work on sustainable projects and all the solutions are short-term with no long-term impact,” noted one Palestinian youth from the West Bank. “The funding shouldn’t be based on the donors’ agenda but serve the beneficiaries,” he said.

In Lebanon, some interviewees complained about uneven or duplicated aid distributions, blaming a lack of coordination between agencies. They called for more income-generating opportunities to break the cycle of dependency on hand-outs.

“Significant corruption and nepotism existed in the distribution of aid,” the report said, with interviewees referring to “accounts of incidents of favoritism within UN agencies for certain ‘connected’ families, especially with regards to resettlement assistance.”

And in Yemen, Eritrean refugees recounted experiences of feeling humiliated and lacking dignity due to humanitarian organizations’ perceived preferential treatment of the Somali refugees compared to other refugees from Arab countries.

The main report noted that “experiences of humanitarian coordination are largely bleak;” refugees complained about having to proactively seek out different organizations and re-tell their stories due to limited referral systems between aid groups.



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Choice and dignity

Lack of choice about what specific aid people received was another theme.

“Affected people consulted in the region seldom felt that their priority needs were met,” the main report said. “This finding was supported by stakeholders who highlighted how affected people at times sell the in-kind assistance they received and use the funds to purchase other goods or services.”

“To truly put people’s needs at the heart of humanitarian action, stakeholders argued that people need to be given a choice over what kind of humanitarian assistance they receive,” it added.

Dana Sleiman, spokesperson for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Lebanon—one of the leading UN agencies helping Syrian refugees—told IRIN, “We are aware of the report and welcome any additions to the discussions on how to further improve humanitarian assistance here in Lebanon.”

“UNHCR staff, the Lebanese government and our partners are in constant contact with refugees throughout the country, listening to their concerns and providing a massive range of support as most refugees arrive here having lost everything.”



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ICVA’s Kasraï said the WHS presented a unique opportunity to carry out a wider systemic consultation, rather than looking at individual agencies or contexts.

“It is quite unusual to get this sort of feedback,” he said. “I think sometimes humanitarian organizations, including donors, UN agencies and

NGOs, can get into a bit of a bubble, using their own language and talking amongst themselves in a jargon that isn’t always understood by the people they are trying to help.”

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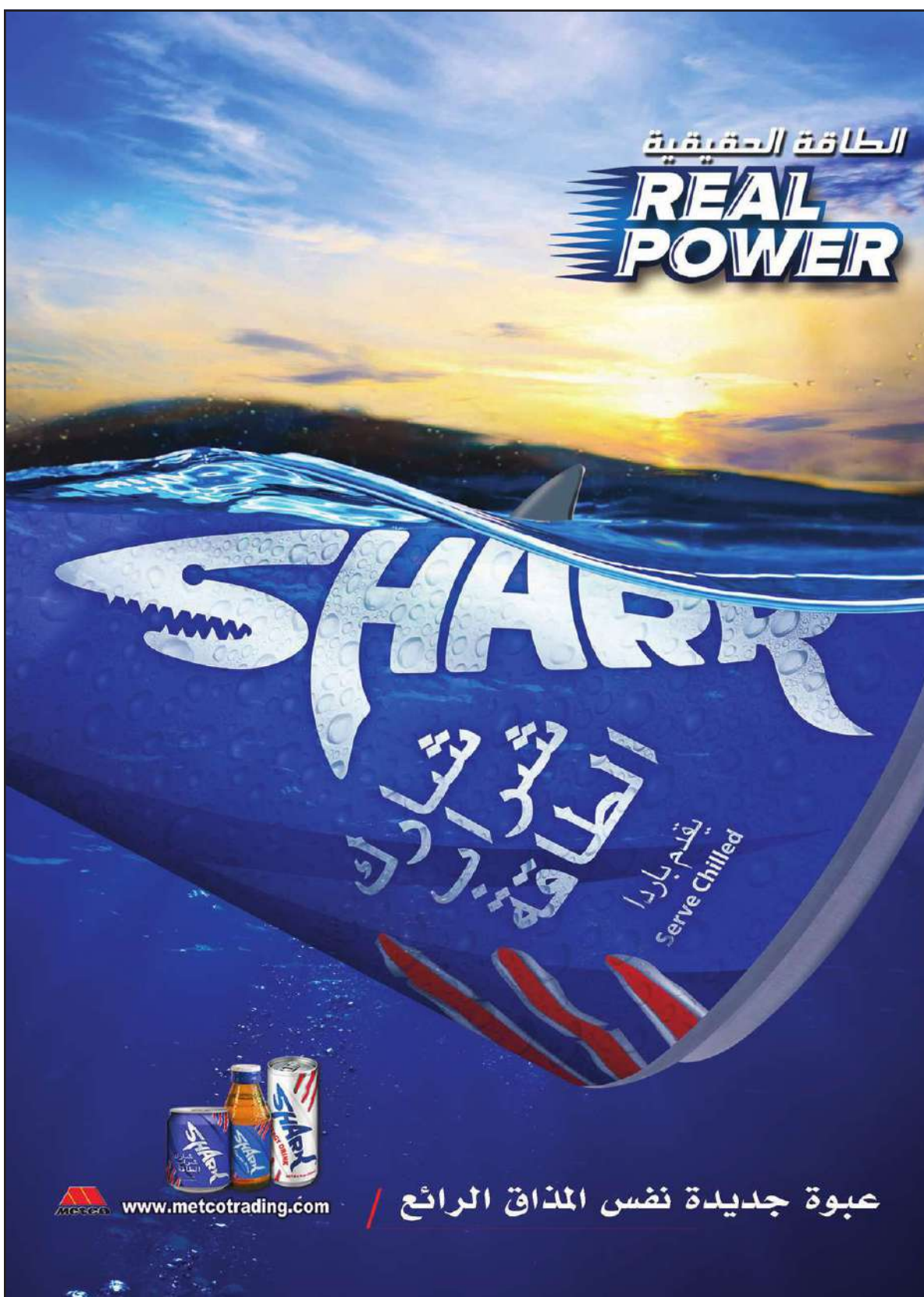
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