



For immediate release – 6 May 2008

Yemen: Seven Newspapers Confiscated and One Daily's Office Under Siege; ARTICLE 19 and HOOD Declare High Alert for the Media in Yemen

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Yemeni government to immediately lift all forms of censorship on the media and return confiscated newspapers.

Between 4 and 5 May, Yemeni authorities confiscated from the market copies of seven independent newspapers, including *Al Diyar*, *Al Share'*, *Al Masdar*, *Al Nida'*, *Al Mustaqilla*, *Al Watani* and *Al Ayyam*. According to an official government statement, the newspapers had published material "harmful to the national unity".

In addition to confiscating copies of independent daily *Al Ayyam*, the Yemeni authorities also detained *Al Ayyam* employees and imposed a siege on its offices. On 6 May, the government had shut down *Al Ayyam* website and prevented all access to it. The authorities were allegedly annoyed with *Al Ayyam's* coverage of events in the south.

"Such measures are unjustified and constitute a dramatic blow to media freedom in Yemen" said Dr. Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director. *"ARTICLE 19 and HOOD call upon the Yemeni Authorities to put an immediate stop to these intimidating tactics against journalists and newspapers, and return the confiscated newspapers copies immediately."*

The Ministry of Information has ordered *Al Ayyam* not to go to print until further notice. *Al Ayyam* had been under strenuous pressure lately for not following the official line. Lawsuits have been filed against its staff, and authorities have repeatedly confiscated and burned its copies as well as harassed the paper's distribution drivers. The authorities have been said to be unhappy with the publication of photos of clashes between government forces and opposition groups in the south.

The article that broke the camel's back was an op-ed by Munir Alkawari published in *Al Masdar* weekly. It called on Yemenis in the north to show solidarity with their brethren in the south who are disgruntled and marginalised by a high rate of unemployment and poverty, and to demonstrate against the regime's policies. The piece, which appeared on the confiscated issue of *Al Madar* on 5 May, called on the president to step down so as to foster unity between north and south.

According to Arafat Mudabish, chief editor of the leading *Al Tagheer* news website, leading journalists and activists in Yemen have regarded the confiscation measure and harassment tactics against all media as an "unprecedented massacre" that had

damaged journalism in Yemen. Journalists in Yemen are systematically under attack, and newspapers suffer from government harassment and extreme measures, he said.

There has been unrest in the impoverished country for a few years now, especially in the south where certain groups feel they are marginalised. Tension mounted in recent months and escalated at times into armed clashes between opposition protesters and government forces.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.