

التحالف اليمني لرصد  
انتهاكات حقوق الإنسان

Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring  
Human Rights Violations



## Yemen Children

### From School Benches To War Trenches

A human rights report documenting the children recruitment in Yemen  
(between January 1 and July 2017 ,30)



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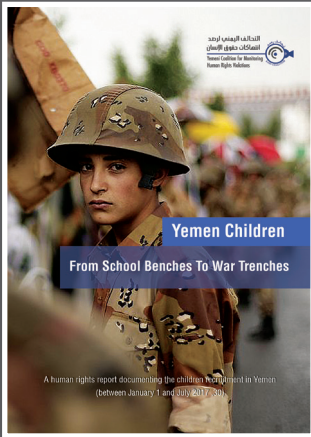
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# Yemen Children From School Benches To War Trenches

Published by YCMHRV



Cover Photo; a child soldier recruited by Houthis-Saleh militia- Sana'a  
Courtesy of; Hani Mohammed

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Yemeni Coalition to Monitor Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV), also known as “Rasd Coalition”, is a coalition of a number of specialized Yemeni NGOs active in human rights issues including monitoring and documenting human rights violations in the country. YCMHRV was established in January 2015, License No. 1240 in response to valid need in the field of human rights, and considering the deteriorating human rights situation in Yemen, the matter that necessitated establishment of such Coalition.

YCMHRV monitors and documents all human rights violations in Yemen and issues specialized reports on them. Also, organizes seminars and various events to disseminate and publicize these reports. YCMHRV submits these reports to relevant concerned entities. Noting that the first step in bringing justice to victims is to document their grievances for the moment of truth, committing ourselves in this respect with relevant human rights standards and laws.

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First Edition 2017 - Taiz

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## Introduction

Child recruitment and their involvement in armed conflicts is a history old practice in Yemen. It is deeply rooted in the awareness of the society and the falsified tribal culture that views it as sources of pride and associates it with masculinity. Tribesmen show off their children carrying arms and they make arms available at the expense of their basic needs of food. In addition to the tribal culture and the lack of community awareness, the economic conditions and the financial problems people face play a major role in the recruitment of children in a country shattered by war for the third year consecutively to the point when 60% of the population are now under poverty line. Most of the victims who have been interviewed by the Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations have stressed that poverty and unemployment are the main reasons that lead to joining the Houthi- Saleh forces and the forces loyal to the Hadi government. In addition to those wars, including the six rounds of war in Sa'ada, the ongoing armed conflict brought to the forefront the phenomenon of children recruitment and the exploitation of children in military actions, which was only limited to a few tribal conflicts or the suicide bombings of the so-called Al-Qaeda, in north and south of the country.

Early in 2011, Child recruitment in Yemen was exacerbated with the start of a wave of peaceful popular protests calling for the overthrow of the regime and the subsequent defection of the regular army. This in turn opened the door for the recruitment of large numbers of children under the age of 18 in the two largest military establishments «Republican Guard Forces» loyal to the former president and «First Armoured Division» which aligned with the popular protests of 2011.

This coincided with a large-scale recruitment of children under the age of 18 by the Houthi armed group, as well as sending them to fight their wars against the tribes of Hajor from the province of Hajjah early in 2012, against the supporters of the Salafi sect in the area of Damaj in the province of Saada in 2013, in their third war with the tribes of Amran along with the 310th Infantry Brigade that fell with the city of Amran on 8 July 2014 and then their invasion of the capital Sana'a on 21 September 2014.

During this period, local human rights organizations have recorded the death and injury of a large number of children who said that the armed group of Houthi had taken their bodies from Damaj to Amran city and to the capital Sana'a.

The Houthi group and the forces loyal to the former president are leading the scene again to achieve the record in the recruitment of 8000 children under the legal age according to previous statistics documented by the Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations between 1 July 2014 and 30 December 2016.

Delving into the depths and details of these events in Yemen during the past few years until the moment, one fact stands out which is that children are the most vulnerable category to the violations and damage caused by the war there, which have implications beyond the present to eliminate the future, which represents everything for the children.

The war entered its third year in Yemen and the phenomenon of recruitment of children and their involvement in armed conflicts increased, especially by the Houthi group and the forces loyal to the former president, which brought them to the point of being abducted from the

streets and forcibly taken from schools to move them directly to the practitioner and the fronts of fighting after their human stockpile of adult fighters seems to have run out.

In response to the calls and appeals of victims and their families, the Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations decided to give special attention to this issue through field visits and close monitoring of the systematic recruitment of children under the age of 18, as well as into a war that was ignited by adults to use young children as fuel.

Although this serious phenomenon has been mentioned in previous human rights reports issued by the Yemeni Coalition to monitor human rights violations, this time, this report gives greater importance to the report and provides an opportunity for the Coalition to shed more light on the subject «The right of childhood in Yemen before the eyes of the world.

### **Official efforts**

- On 3 November 2011, the Commander of the North West Military Region, Commander of the First Armoured Division, Major General Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar, ordered the demobilization of 100 recruits under the age of 18, who were recruited at the behest of their families, during the 2011 events - according to the resolution.
- In his memorandum issued on 15 November 2011, the Minister of Defense, Major General Mohammad Nasser Ahmad, directed the Personnel and General Reserve Department to investigate the recruitment cases that exist in violation of the recruitment conditions such as recruiting children below the age of 18 and to immediately dismiss them and bring the perpetrators to justice.

- On 18 August 2012, the President of the Republic, in his memorandum No. 5570, addressed to the Prime Minister to examine the findings of the jurists on the position of national legislation on the recruitment and involvement of children in armed conflicts and to take the necessary measures in this regard in conformity with the relevant international treaties and conventions ratified by Yemen.
- In May 2014, the Government of National Accord, headed by Mr. Mohamed Salem Basandwa, approved a plan to end the recruitment of children in the armed forces in accordance with the directives of the President of the Republic and in response to the demands of the Secretary-General of the United Nations through his Special Envoy for Children, Laila Zerrougui, who visited Yemen in mid-2012 and met with President Abdurbo Mansour Hadi and his government to discuss the issue of the recruitment of children.
- At the end of the same year, with the start of the rebellion and the coup against the state authorities and the control of all its institutions by force of arms, the progress that had begun with the amendment of certain national laws and legislations to impose the harshest penalties against the perpetrators of the crime of children recruitment and with the preparation of national programs and strategies to implement the provisions of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child.

## **Methodology of the report**

- In this report, the Monitoring and Documentation team of the Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations adopted the international standards followed in monitoring and documenting violations. The team conducted 21 videotaped interviews with

children recruited by the Houthi group and forces loyal to the former president and captured by the forces loyal to the Hadi government in the governorates of Taiz and Marib.

- The team also conducted 73 written interviews with child soldiers and eyewitnesses on the recruitment of persons below the age of 18 in several Yemeni governorates (Sana'a, Thamar, Amran, Taiz, Marib, Al- Jawf, Rima, Al-Bayda, Al-Mahweet, Ibb, Hodeidah). Added to that were the reliable database and the real-time information collected by the team during the monitoring and documentation process, which was drawn from during the reporting period.
- As for the areas under the control of the Houthi group and the forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, which could not be reached for reasons and considerations related to the security and safety of field monitors, the team has only made use of the reports made by the families and relatives of the victims. The team committed to the families and relatives of the victims to keep their reports confidential so as not to render them vulnerable to those who violated the rights of their children.
- The team has also adopted documents and verifiable concrete evidence, including death certificates for child soldiers who were killed in the battlefield, medical reports of the wounded and the photographs of child victims that the Houthi Group usually publish and distribute during funerals or during the events of what is known as the Martyr's Festival.

- The observations made by the field Monitoring and Documentation team are the main points of reference, especially since many aspects of the children recruitment and their involvement in armed conflicts have become part of a daily scene that is repeated in front of everyone, specifically at the Houthi-Saleh checkpoints or on the streets, public markets and neighborhoods close to the locations of the parties involved in the armed conflict, but it is difficult to document them or even capture them on tape.

## Legal Framework

The international humanitarian law defines a child soldier as “every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” . The term «recruitment» refers to the “compulsory, forced or voluntary placement of children in any kind of armed forces or groups.

The term «child labor» is a broader concept than «recruitment», referring to the use of children by armed forces or armed groups in any capacity, including “the use of children as male or female combatants, cooks, porters, correspondents or spies.”

The draft constitution issued in January 2015 criminalizes the voluntary recruitment of all persons below the age of 18, while Article 6 of the Yemeni Constitution affirms adherence to the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of the Arab League and all the generally recognized rules of the international law. Article 149 of the Yemeni Child Rights Act of 2002 states: “The State shall respect and protect the rules of international law applicable in armed conflicts related to children through: (a- Prohibiting children from carrying arms, b- protecting children from the effects of armed

conflicts, c- protecting children who suffer from revenge problems, d- not to directly involve children in war, e- not to recruit any person below the age of 18).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasizes that: "...the child shall be protected from all forms of neglect, cruelty, economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development."

Article 39 of the same Convention states: "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote the physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child who is the victim of any form of neglect, exploitation or abuse, torture or other form of treatment or Cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment or armed conflict, which shall take place in an environment that promotes the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.

On 1 July 1998, the list of war crimes under the jurisdiction of the Rome Criminal Court adopted the participation of children below the age of 15 actively participating in hostilities or being recruited into the national armed forces during an armed conflict of an international level. The Additional Protocol to the first of the Geneva Conventions of 1977 sets the legal age for recruitment to 16 years. However, the Optional Protocol of the year 2000 which was added to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 raises the age of compulsory recruitment to 18 years and prohibited any regular army or armed groups to use children below this age in any way.

The Human Rights Act also declares the age of 18 as the minimum legal age limit for recruiting and using children in hostilities and parties that

recruit and use children in armed conflicts shall be added to the annual list of shame issued by the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

## **Executive summary**

The Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations has documented 630 cases of recruitment of children under the legal age of 18 years as the minimum age for joining the ranks of the armed forces set by the Yemeni legislator, as well as international conventions and treaties.

Figures and statistics indicate that the Houthi militia and the former president recruited 583 children, or 93 percent, while 47 others were recruited by the regular and popular resistance forces of the legitimate government, accounting for 7 percent of the total number of documented cases of child recruitment.

The figures included in this report show that 118 children were killed and 20 others wounded while they were fighting alongside the Houthi group and the forces loyal to the former president on several fronts spread over Taiz, Marib, Sanaa, Al Jawf, Bayda, Saada and Hajja. Four children were killed and 31 others were wounded as they fought in the ranks of the legitimate government and popular resistance forces in Taiz and Marib governorates.

The team also registered 99 child soldiers who were held in the prisons of the legitimate government forces as prisoners of war after they were caught fighting in the ranks of al-Houthi and the forces loyal to the former president in Taiz, Marib, Sana'a and al-Bayda. Exchange deals for prisoners were carried out, while other captives have been handed over to their families in return for written statements and pledges to ensure

they will not to fight again with «Houthi» and «Saleh.»

While the team was unable to access the prisons of the Houthi group and its ally, «Saleh», to identify and determine the number of prisoners of children recruited by the legitimate government forces and popular resistance if any.

According to statistics and figures collected by the Yemeni Coalition team to monitor human rights violations, 346 child soldiers are still fighting alongside the Houthi group and the forces loyal to the former president across the borders with Saudi Arabia and on the battle fronts in the governorates of Taiz, Marib, Sana'a, Bayda and Sa'ada), as opposed to 11 children who continue to fight with the legitimate government forces supported by popular resistance in Taiz, Al-Jawf, Sana'a and Marib.

According to documented figures and statistics, the number of children who have left school and went to fighting fronts on a voluntary or compulsory basis is (451) children, including (408) primary school students and (38) secondary school students while the number of child soldiers who did not join school education is (179) children.

During the field monitoring and collection of victims' data, the Yemeni Coalition team found that 43% of the children recruited during the reporting period belonged to families with poor living conditions. (36%) of those children to low-income families (21%) are middle-income families and those who believe that their involvement in fighting with one party or another is a result of conviction and voluntary.

The Houthi group and the forces loyal to the former president set up training camps for child recruits to prepare them for direct combat.

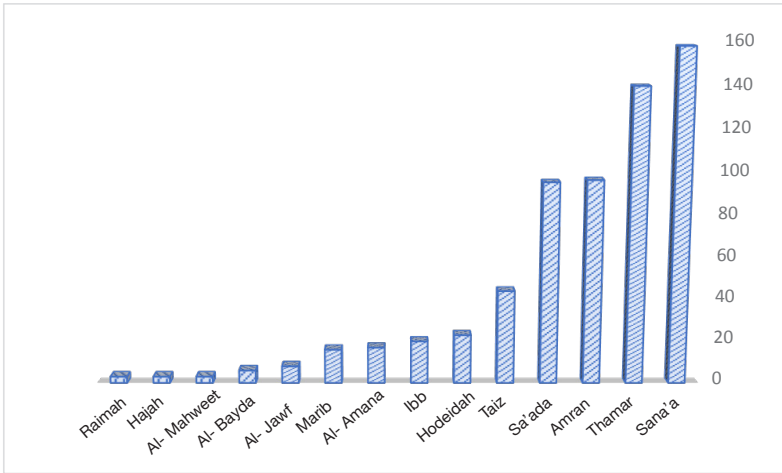
The camps were concentrated in the provinces of Amanat Al Asima, Al-Bayda, Thamar and al-Mahweet. The courses were accompanied by other «cultural» courses which included lessons and awareness lectures which functioned as «brainwashing», based on falsifying reality and twisting facts as a means of persuading child soldiers to fight alongside them against what they call internal and external aggression.

The presence of such training camps indicates that Houthi and forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh systematically trained children under the age of 18 to use all kinds of light, medium and heavy weapons and then have them deployed to the fronts to participate in actual combat directly during military operations, including the various forms installation and removal of land mines

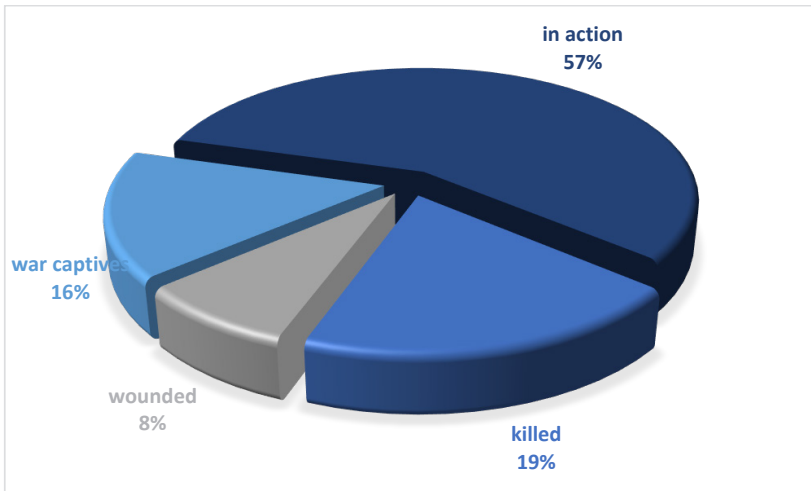
A table showing the qualitative and geographical distribution of recruitment cases in Yemen during the period from 1 January to 30 July 2017

| Governorate | killed | wounded | War captives | In action | total |
|-------------|--------|---------|--------------|-----------|-------|
| Sana'a      | 11     |         | 83           | 63        | 157   |
| Thamar      | 32     | 5       |              | 102       | 139   |
| Amran       | 37     | 3       | 1            | 55        | 96    |
| Sa'ada      | 22     |         | 2            | 71        | 95    |
| Taiz        | 3      | 33      | 3            | 5         | 44    |
| Hodeidah    | 7      | 3       |              | 13        | 23    |
| Ibb         | 8      | 5       | 4            | 3         | 20    |
| Al- Amana   | 2      |         |              | 15        | 17    |
| Marib       |        |         | 1            | 15        | 16    |
| Al- Jawf    |        | 1       |              | 7         | 8     |
| Al- Bayda   |        |         |              | 6         | 6     |
| Al- Mahweet |        |         | 3            |           | 3     |
| Hajah       | 1      |         | 1            | 1         | 3     |
| Raimah      |        | 1       | 1            | 1         | 3     |
| Total       | 123    | 51      | 99           | 357       | 630   |

A diagram showing the geographical distribution of recruitment cases in Yemen



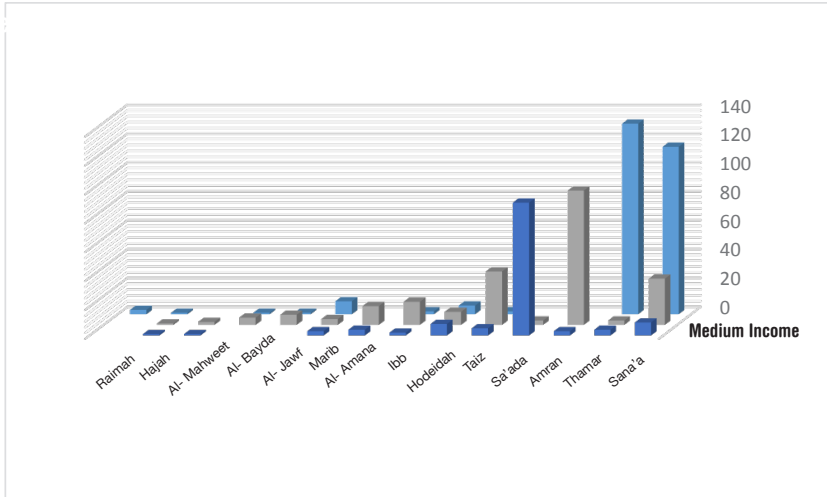
a chart showing the distribution of the victims according to their status



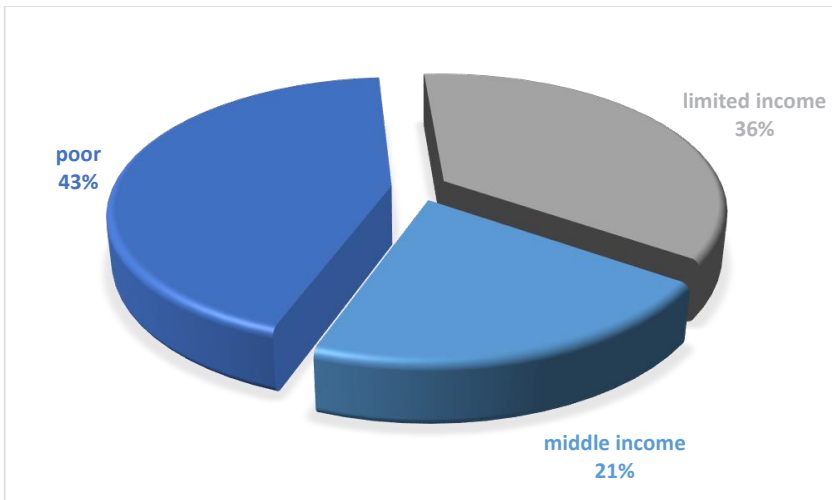
A table showing the cases of conscription conscripted by the economic level of the families of the victims

| <b>governorate</b> | <b>Very poor</b> | <b>limited income</b> | <b>Middle income</b> | <b>total</b> |
|--------------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Sana'a             | 116              | 32                    | 9                    | 157          |
| Thamar             | 132              | 3                     | 4                    | 139          |
| Amran              |                  | 93                    | 3                    | 96           |
| Sa'ada             |                  | 3                     | 92                   | 95           |
| Taiz               | 2                | 37                    | 5                    | 44           |
| Hodeidah           | 6                | 9                     | 8                    | 23           |
| Ibb                | 2                | 16                    | 2                    | 20           |
| Al- Amana          |                  | 13                    | 4                    | 17           |
| Marib              | 9                | 4                     | 3                    | 16           |
| Al- Jawf           | 1                | 7                     |                      | 8            |
| Al- Bayda          | 1                | 5                     |                      | 6            |
| Al- Mahweet        |                  | 2                     | 1                    | 3            |
| Hajah              | 1                | 1                     | 1                    | 3            |
| Raimah             | 3                |                       |                      | 3            |
| Total              | 273              | 225                   | 132                  | 630          |

A chart showing the distribution of recruitment cases according to the economic conditions of the victims' families



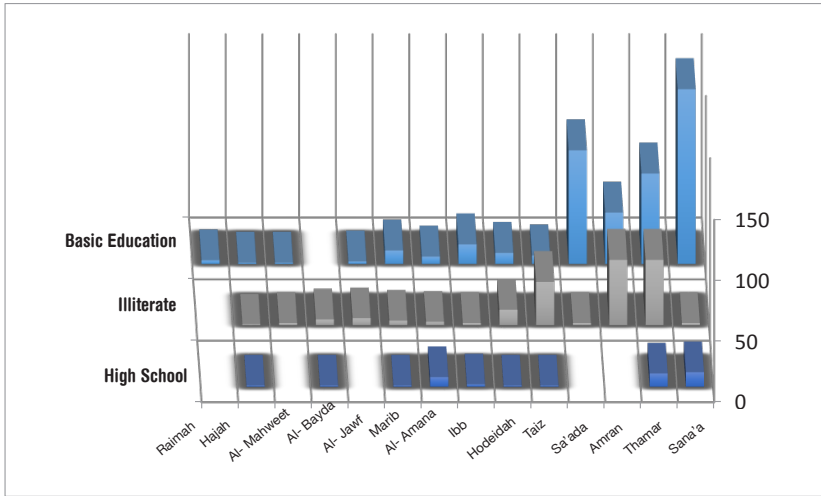
a chart showing the economic conditions of the victims' families who are mentioned in the report



A table showing the child recruit cases distributed according to the educational levels of the victims

| <b>governorate</b> | <b>Standard education students</b> | <b>Secondary school students</b> | <b>uneducated</b> | <b>total</b> |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Sana'a             | 143                                | 12                               | 2                 | 157          |
| Thamar             | 74                                 | 11                               | 54                | 139          |
| Amran              | 42                                 |                                  | 54                | 96           |
| Sa'ada             | 93                                 |                                  | 2                 | 95           |
| Taiz               | 7                                  | 1                                | 36                | 44           |
| Hodeidah           | 9                                  | 1                                | 13                | 23           |
| Ibb                | 16                                 | 2                                | 2                 | 20           |
| Al- Amana          | 6                                  | 8                                | 3                 | 17           |
| Marib              | 11                                 | 1                                | 4                 | 16           |
| Al- Jawf           | 2                                  |                                  | 6                 | 8            |
| Al- Bayda          |                                    | 1                                | 5                 | 6            |
| Al- Mah-<br>weet   | 1                                  |                                  | 2                 | 3            |
| Hajah              | 1                                  | 1                                | 1                 | 3            |
| Raimah             | 3                                  |                                  |                   | 3            |
| Total              | 408                                | 38                               | 184               | 630          |

a chart showing the distribution of children recruits according to the level of their education



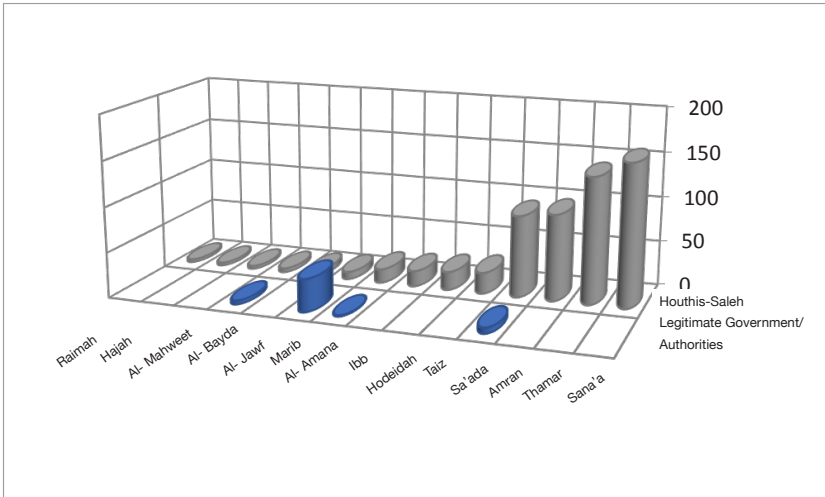
A chart showing the percentage of child recruitment according the level of education



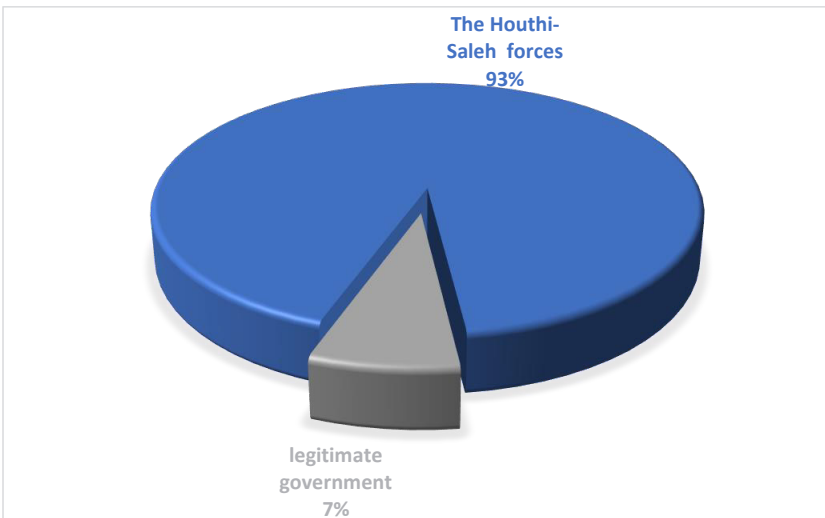
A table showing child recruitment according to the violating party

| <b>governorate</b> | <b>The Houthi- Saleh forces</b> | <b>Legitimate government</b> | <b>total</b> |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| Sana'a             | 157                             |                              | 157          |
| Thamar             | 139                             |                              | 139          |
| Amran              | 90                              | 6                            | 96           |
| Sa'ada             | 95                              |                              | 95           |
| Taiz               | 8                               | 36                           | 44           |
| Hodeidah           | 23                              |                              | 23           |
| Ibb                | 20                              |                              | 20           |
| Al- Amana          | 17                              |                              | 17           |
| Marib              | 15                              | 1                            | 16           |
| Al- Jawf           | 4                               | 4                            | 8            |
| Al- Bayda          | 6                               |                              | 6            |
| Al- Mahweet        | 3                               |                              | 3            |
| Hajah              | 3                               |                              | 3            |
| Raimah             | 3                               |                              | 3            |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>583</b>                      | <b>47</b>                    | <b>630</b>   |

A chart showing the cases of child recruitment distributed by the recruiter



A chart showing the most recruiting party for children in Yemen during the report period



## Child recruits in captivity

The 16-year-old boy from Ibb, Yarm district, attempted to reduce the story of his recruitment by the Houthi group, which exploited his need to work and earn money. He was taken with children of his age who lived the same difficult living conditions to the city of Rada'a to take them to the "orientation sessions" before moving them to the eastern city of Anis district of Thamar to attend a combat training which lasted for two months. They were trained on the use of all types of weapons, light and medium, including the firing of "mortar," he said.

"We finished the combat training and were taken directly to the building of the government compound in Thamar. On the morning of the second day, they took us by bus to Al-Saleh city, east of Taiz," he said. Where we were armed there and then moved us over a bus and we only ran in the presidential palace where the fighting was burning between the Houthis and the resistance and found ourselves in the middle and on the second day surprised the resistance has besieged the palace from several sides, what was in front of us, but handed our weapons and surrendered and then took us to prison Treated us as prisoners of war and did not harm us."

The same happened with HACN, 16, from the village of Joran, the directorate of al-Ridma, Ibb governorate, whose family was displaced and assigned to stay at home to guard him and cultivate the land. He was an easy prey and a grabber. To the supporters of the Houthi group in the region, who exploited the absence of his father, they repeatedly frequented him and offer him to join them as a fighter, but he refused all these offers and temptations, which made the same group leader to

move the car “kit” to the joran and took H. with six other children from the same village by force Without the knowledge of their parents accused of their loyalty to legitimacy.

“They took us in the night after they made us feel like they were going to the town of Radaa to participate in a polarization session,” he said, speaking to a team of the Yemeni Coalition to monitor the violations they had met in a prison of the legitimate forces in Taiz. “Then they took us back to Ibb city and deployed us to the security points scattered in the streets and there we were surprised after the end of the session; and they took us to the Anis area in the city of Thamar to participate in a second “combat”.

“After the combat session in Thamar, I and my friends asked them to take us back to our village as they promised us. They told us that they would take us to the town of Al-Saleh in Taiz to hand over our weapons and then return us directly to Ibb city to be deployed on the security checkpoints.” One day after our arrival, the [Presidential] Palace was attacked and cordoned off from all sides. We were captured by members of the army and the popular resistance who treated us with humanity and respect.”

(A. Z. Y. M. A.) 16 years, Al-Katbah village, Al-Radhma district, Ibb governorate, narrated his story, “I had a disagreement with my mother in the house and she took me to the police department, which is controlled by al-Houthi group, and asked them to put me in jail, which they did” he said. “On the morning of the second day, my mother returned to the police department. She wanted me to be released. They told her they would take me to be trained in combat and they would send me to the front lines. My mother refused and kept coming to the police department every day and she had her veils burnt twice [as a sign of

cultural protest] to entice them to release me, but they did not respond to her demands.

He continued: “They took me directly from the prison to the Anis area in Tamar governorate where we had two training sessions on how to deal with rifles such as the Zcheck-made A-K47, L12 and the RPG of all kinds. They drove us to Tamar city and then to Al Saleh Town in Taiz claiming that they will give us firearms and then drive us back home. But instead they drove us to the presidential palace in Taiz without our knowledge, taking advantage of our lack of knowledge of the city of Taiz, because it was our first time to enter Taiz.”

“The resistance forces had started attacking the Presidential Palace a day before we arrived and it was about to fall. We did not have enough supplies and weapons. The Houthi leaders who brought us to the palace as reinforcements left immediately and left us facing death. We had no option except to surrender.” he added.

A. concluded his story, “I was informed that my mother is visiting the police Department where she had me jailed every other day, looking for me, demanding my release as I am the only breadwinner. She does not know until now that I was forced to fight with the Houthi group and I am now captivated by the Resistance forces.”

(M. F. A. S. A), 16, from the district of Haidan from Sa’ada governorate, in April 2016 was forced to join the ranks of the Houthi armed group which has taken the air strikes of Saudi-led coalition against their forces stationed in villages and residential neighborhood as a pretext to incite children before the adults to fight on their side against what it called the Saudi-American aggression, according to M.

M. first served in a checkpoint in al-Jawf where he spent four months serving day and night as a guard in what the group calls the “Amnyyat” (security checkpoints). He returned to his village of al-Raqqa. But before he could feel the happiness of reuniting with his family, the second military mission was ready for him. He was transferred to the Yemeni-Saudi border to fight battles that military units at the highest level of training and equipped with the latest weapons and combat training were unable to fight, and therefore M. could not hold for long and he returned to his family after one month.

M. moved in several Houthi-Saleh frontlines until he ended up with a one-year younger friend of his, captured by the forces of the army and the resistance in Taiz.

M. added, “We were headed to meet a friend in the town of al-Turba, to request him to transfer us from frontlines to security checkpoints, when we were captured by the members of the resistance in Al- Arabeen st. (40 st.) when we were unarmed and we were taken to prison.”

(G. A. A.), 15, from Yarim district, Ibb governorate, told the Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations team about what happened with him. He said, “I was taken along with a group of children from Yarim to Rada’a in al-Bayda governorate to participate in an orientation session. A month later, we were transferred to Anis district, Thamar governorate to take part in combat training for a month. Then we were driven to the stadium in Thamar and from there we were bus-driven to give us firearms and then be deployed to the various checkpoints in Ibb as they promised us from the beginning. We arrived a little after midnight to find ourselves in Al- Saleh city in Taiz.”

He added, “We had dinner in Al-Saleh city and were given firearms. We were bus-driven again to the Presidential Palace in Taiz. We were not told that we were taken to the battlefields until we were there. With the little arms and ammunitions we had, we fought for two days and then we surrendered to the forces of the army and resistance.”

All this happened without the knowledge of G. A. A’s family who refused to let him join any armed groups and have no clue about his whereabouts because he does not have a mobile phone to connect with any of his relatives. They still don’t know anything about him as of the date of the interview with the YCMHRV team in Taiz.

(R. M. A. H), 16, from Al- Shahil district, Hajah governorate, is a ninth-grade school dropout. He left school to join ranks with the Houthi-Saleh forces without his family’s knowledge.

He said, “We attended the orientation session in Sana’a and then we were moved to Al- Bayda and from there to Taiz. We were sent to Taiz as armed reinforcement. we stayed in Taiz for a while until we were captured by the resistance forces in Wadi Ghurab while we were on route back the Saleh City but we lost our way on a Hilux truck with six pieces of machine guns and seven hundred thousand Rails for food supplies.”

His family was not aware of joining the ranks of the fighters of the Houthi group and the forces loyal to the former president. When the news reached them after he left the combat session, they continued with him immediately, trying to convince him to return to them and to abandon his decision, but to no avail.

(M. A. H. H), 17, from Dhahyan district in Sa’adah governorate, joined the ranks of the Houthi-Saleh forces when he was 15. He was captured

two years later at the age of 17 by the resistance forces in the Western front of Taiz. He claims that he was working with the committee of war education and awareness which was responsible for distributing educational brochures to the fighters in the battlefields.

He said, “I was a ninth-grade school student but after the school was closed in our district because of the war, the Houthi group asked us to join them to fight against those who caused our schools to be closed and who deprived us of education. I participated in an orientation session in Sa’adah and then I moved to Sana’a. We were trained on how to dismantle light arms and how to use them. Then we were driven to Rada’a, Al-Bayda, and from there we were driven to Aden, Sana’a and then finally to Taiz.”

He added, “When we heading to Taiz through Hodeidah and Al- Makha, we arrived at a resistance checkpoint at Al- Bi’rarah area in two cars, carrying three A.K. guns, three ammunition magazines, two hand guns, a laptop some educational handouts and brouchers . That’s how we came to be captured.”

(Y. A. M. S.), 16, from Al- Haymah Al-Dakhiliah, Sana’a governorate, said, “The Houthi group has been active in our village for years. They got to us through their handouts and the curricula they used to distribute and teach it to us. When the war began, one member of the Houthi group in our village suggested that I should join the ranks of mujahideen in the group. He took me with 3 other children to their headquarters in Asir area, in Amant Al-Asimah. We attended an orientation session for a month and then we were given firearms and were driven to Hodeidah and from there we returned to Sana’a.”

He continued, “Fighting intensified in Al-Dahi area, in the western part of Taiz. We were sent there as reinforcement from Sana’a. As we arrived to the Saleh town, we were given numbered necklaces so that we would be identified if we were hit by an airstrike. We were driven straight to Taiz University and there we were seized and captured by the members of the army and resistance. “

(Y. A. H. K. B), 16, from Al-Jabeen in Riamah governorate, is a seventh school grade student whose sole concern in life was to continue his education. “A leading member in the Houthi group called Abu Yehya Al- Dialami opened an orientation center claiming it to be an educational center. We arrived at the Houthi center thinking that we would learn there. We made us stay there for a day and then they moved us to Al- Bayda claiming that there are no teachers in Al- Jabeen. We were accommodated in a military site and brought teachers to teach us from the handouts of the Al- Sayyid, i.e. the handouts of Hussien Badruddin Al- Houthi,” he said.

He continued, “We were told that the site in which we are is an educational center and it does not have anything to do with war or military work. We stayed there for fifteen days. Then we were told that the group is under attack and that they needed us to help them as reinforcement for two days, after which we would return to the site to continue our education.”

On 17 March 2017 the Houthi-Saleh forces in Al- Bayda gave firearms to (Y. A. H. K. B) and several other child recruits. They were all taken to Al- Abeedah frontline at about 2 a.m., and he was captured by the members of the army and resistance before dawn, according to his testimony.

(A. A. A. M. Y.), 16, from Mulhan district, Al- Mahweet governorate, is an eighth grade student who left school along with ten other younger students to join the ranks of the Houthi/ Saleh forces through a man named Abdullah Nasr who is also known as Abu Shihab.

(A. A. A. M. Y.) narrated the story of his recruitment, “Abu Shihab used to come to our house while I was studying with my classmates. He used to say American and Israeli forces have invaded Yemen and they want to colonize our country. He offered to recruit us in return for a monthly salary. Then I and 10 other younger classmates of mine were taken to the Central Security camp in Al- Mahweet. We stayed there for fifteen days listening to lectures by a man named Abu Zeid from Sa’adah. We were taken to take part in an orientation session in a place unknown to us because to take us in and out of that place at night. Then we were returned to the Central Security camp where we stayed for a month and then we were transferred to Sana’a and from there to Al- Fardhah in Nihm, under the command of Abu Haydar Al-Hamzi.”

According to the testimony of (A. A. A. M. Y.) the Houthi-Saleh forces gave him firearms along with 10 younger children in Al-Fardhah claiming that they would deploy them to the Amnyyat (security checkpoints) but instead they were taken to the frontlines of war and hence they could not withstand for more than one day. They fell captive to the forces of the army supported by the forces of the popular resistance in Fardhah Nihm.

A. A. A. M. Y. along with other friends still hopes that they will be able to go back to their families and to start over again away from armed conflicts which could have cost his life and could have ruined his future. Child recruits who are still in the frontlines

(Y. M. S. Dh), 14, from Qilab village, Muswar district, Amran governorate, was a sixth grade student. The operational leader of the group in the village came to him and convinced him to join the ranks of the forces of the Houthi/ Saleh to defend his country against what he called “foreign aggression”.

(Y. M. S. Dh) left his school bag and carried another bag full of grenades and ammunitions. He was smuggled on the 10 March 2017 to Amran without the knowledge of his father or any of his relatives. From there, he was transferred to the Nihm frontlines where he still fights till the date of writing this report.

(W. A. N. K), 14, from Al- Usha district, Amran governorate, is a seventh grade- dropout. He was forced to join the ranks of the Houthi/ Saleh forces. He was deployed along with other children to battle frontlines on 11 January 2017 after misleadingly telling them that our country was being attacked by foreign countries and defending our country is everyone’s responsibility including children.

According to a written statement by one of W’s relatives to the Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations in Amarn, W’s family does not know anything about him or about the children who went with him, and whether they are dead or alive.

(M. A. H. Y. K.), 12, from Qilab village, Muswar district, Amran governorate, was a sixth grade student who left school to join the ranks of the Houthi/ Saleh forces on 10 March 2017 through the Houthi operational leader, Abdul Fattah Ismael Al- Hayqi without the knowledge of his family.

According to one of the child’s relatives, the child’s parents went to the Houthi operational leader who recruited him and asked him to let them

know his whereabouts. He misled them into believing that their son is in Sa'adah attending an educational session and that he would be back soon.

Eyewitnesses, however, confirm that they saw (M. A. H. Y. K.) heavily armed on board of one the Houthi- Saleh military trucks with other fighters. They were on route as reinforcements to the battlefields.

(F. S. S. F.), 15, from Al- Sarah village, Muswar district, Amran governorate, was a seventh grade student who left school to join the ranks of the Houthi- Saleh forces on 23 February 2017 through the Houthi operational leader, Abdul Fattah Ismael Al- Hayqi.

(F. S. S. F.) was transferred to one of the most heated battlefields in Al- Mutton, Al- Jawf governorate. He is still there fighting on the side of the Houthi- Saleh forces against the forces loyal to the Hadi government till the date of writing this report.

(B. M. H. Sh.), 16, from Al- Usha district, Amran governorate, joined the ranks of the Houthi- Saleh forces earlier this year. He was sent to the battle frontlines in Al- Jawf on Saturday 1 July 2017 at 3:00 p.m. He is still there till the date of writing this report.

(M. L. R. R.), 16, from Al- Lawz mountain, Khawlan district, Sana'a governorate, is an eighth grade student who left school to join the ranks of the Houthi- Saleh forces early in 2017 through the Houthi operational leader Abu Mursil who used all methods of intimidation against him. He sent him to battle frontlines with the knowledge of his family. In a written statement received by the Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations, the child's family said that they did not know anything about their son's whereabouts and that he was not the only

child recruited by the Houthi- Saleh forces from Al- Lawz mountain in Khawlan.

(Y. S. S. A. S), 16, from Khawlan Al- Tiyal, is an eighth grade student who left school to join the ranks of the Houthi- Saleh forces on 6 March 2017. According to eyewitnesses, the Houthi group took advantage of the difficult circumstances under which the child lived as the only breadwinner of a 70- year- old mother, and sent to the battle frontlines in Taiz. His fate is yet to be known.

### **Child recruits who were killed in action**

Dawood Mohammed Ali Rajeh, 14, was an eighth grade student. He joined the ranks of the Houthi- Saleh forces in Nihm frontline, east of Sana'a. He was recruited by his step brother Abdulrahman al-Jarmouzi. On 29 April 2017, Dawood was killed while fighting on the side of the Houthi- Saleh forces in Nihm front against the forces loyal to the Hadi government. On 23 May 2017, he was buried in his hometown of Ghorban village in Al- Manar district, Thamar governorate.

Ahmad Mohammed Sharaf al-Din, also known as Abu Talib, 16, from Qarat Ahmed village, Maswar district, Amran governorate, was a ninth grade student who left school to join the ranks of the Houthi- Saleh forces. He was recruited by his relative, the Houthi operational leader, Moahmmed Abdu Mohammed Sharaf al-Din.

Ahmed continued to fight alongside the Houthi- Saleh forces against the forces loyal to the Hadi government and the popular resistance in more than one front and kept moving between several governorates for about a year and a half until he was killed in Taiz on 12 March 2017. Zeid Ali Musleh Hussein Sha'alan, 14, from Beit Sha'alan area, Jabal Yazid district, Amran governorate, was an eighth grade dropout. In

spite of being a bright student, Zeid left school to join the ranks of the Houthi- Saleh forces as an escort of a Houthi field military leader for more than six months. He was then transferred to the Nihm Front to fight alongside the Houthi- Saleh forces where he was killed on Friday 10 February 2017 at 10 a.m. after an airstrike hit their site.

Ali Muhsin Muhsin Ga'afar, 15, from Shawkan area, Khawlan district, Sana'a governorate, was an eighth grade dropout who left school to join the ranks of the Houthi- Saleh forces in Marib front without the knowledge of his family. He continued to fight there until he was killed by the forces loyal to the Hadi government and the popular resistance. His body was handed over to his family early in March 2017.

Abdulkareem Ali Ali Abdullah Al-Wada'I, 16, from the Jabal Yazid district, Amran governorate, was an eighth grade dropout who left school to join the ranks of the Houthi- Saleh forces and continued to fight alongside them against the forces loyal to the Hadi government in the Nihm front, east of Sana'a governorate until he was killed on Friday 10 February 2017.

Abdul latif Ali Abbas Al- Shahrany, 15, from Shahran village, Jabal Yazid district, Amran governorate, was an eighth grade dropout who left school to join the ranks of the Houthi- Saleh forces on 9 March 2017.

The first task assigned by the Houthi- Saleh forces to the child was to fight on the Yemen- Saudi border for more than two months after which he returned to his village in Jabal Yazid. He was again moved with a group of fighters early in May this year to the city of Al-Makha, Taiz. He continued to fight there against the forces loyal to the Hadi government supported by the Arab coalition forces and popular resistance until

he was killed on Saturday 26 May 2017, before he completed 15 years of age.

Fawaz Mohsin Mohsin Farhan, 14, from Beit Farhan village, Bani Mahdi sub- district, Maswar district, Amran governorate, was an eighth grade dropout who left school to join the ranks of the Houthi- Saleh forces early in January last year. According to the statement made by his family, he was misled into believing that he was going to fight America and Israel because they are trying to colonize our country.

Fawaz moved between several fronts fighting alongside Houthi- Saleh forces until he was killed in Taiz on 13 January 2017.

Fawaz Sadiq Hamoud Al- Rajawi, 15, from Al- Hadabah Al- Wusta area, Amran governorate, was an eighth grade dropout who left school to join the ranks of the Houthi- Saleh forces on 10 March 2016.

In the beginning, he was deployed to the Houthi checkpoints known as “Al Amnyyat” (Security checkpoints) where he served for three months. He was then moved to the Taiz front to fight alongside the Houthi- Saleh forces against the forces loyal to the Hadi government and the popular resistance. He was killed there on 21 April 2017.

### **Child recruits who were wounded in action**

(K. H. Y. R), 15, from Eyal Suraih district, Amran governorate, was a seventh grade dropout who left school to join the ranks of the Houthi- Saleh forces earlier this year. He was directly moved the Silwo front in Taiz governorate where he continued to fight alongside the Houthi- Saleh forces against the forces loyal to the Hadi government and the popular resistance until he was wounded in his right leg on Tuesday 14 March 2017 at 8 a.m.

The Houthi- Saleh forces deprived thousands of school children in Al-Khab and Al- Sha'ath district in Al- Jawf governorate, from going to school for two years as they closed all the schools in the area, refusing to bear their responsibilities as a de- facto authority toward the community. As if this was not enough, they took advantage of every chance they to recruit the idle children by using various recruiting methods. (H. M. A. F), 14, from Al- Khab and Al- Sha'ath district in Al- Jawf governorate, is one of the children who were thrown to the battle front-lines by the Houthi- Saleh forces with the promise of granting them military ranks, monthly salary and appointing them as operational leaders of the group in their areas. But the children discovered the hellish nightmare of neglect which they did not expect from the Houthi- Saleh forces.

(H. M. A. F) was wounded in his left leg while fighting alongside the Houthi- Saleh forces in Al- Jawf governorate. He returned to his family cursing his luck and feeling sorry for falling victim to the deceit and malice of what he called the brokers of the Houthi group who were responsible for recruiting children.

(H. M. A. F) continues, “had I stayed at home, I would not have been wounded. I wish I had refused to join the ranks of the Houthi forces. They promised me a salary, a rank in the military and a name and fame. But they left for dead when I was wounded. They never cared to treat my wounds but left me to my mother. May Allah Be Enough against those who misled us into fighting with the group and then left us helpless with our mothers.”

When asked about his level of education before joining the Houthi-Saleh forces, (H. M. A. F) made a very deep sigh that said a lot about the depth of the grief he felt for every moment he wasted in the battle-

field away from his school: “We were studying before we joined the ranks of the Houthi forces, and we had dreams of a bright future. But they came, closed schools and destroyed education. They kept us away from our schools so that it is easy for them to mislead us and drag us to fight on their side.”

## **Recommendations:**

### **For the Houthi- Saleh Forces**

- The immediate cessation of the recruitment of persons below the age of 18, as well as the involvement of children in direct hostilities or any other functions prohibited by national laws, legislations, conventions, treaties and international conventions ratified by Yemen.
- Taking immediate and necessary actions to ensure the return of all child soldiers to their families and paying fair compensation for all human, material and psychological losses that occurred during the period of recruitment.
- Freeing all child soldiers who were captured during their involvement in battles alongside the forces of the legitimate government through the ongoing exchange deals, or through the coordination with interested local and international bodies and organizations.

### **For the legitimate government:**

- Using modern techniques to determine the age of any suspected

minor, even if he holds documents proving otherwise. The government should also take immediate practical measures to release and rehabilitate the current child recruits in the regular army and popular resistance, in accordance with the relevant Principles of the Paris Convention.

- Taking measures to release child soldiers who were captured in the fight against with the Houthi and Saleh forces and work on their rehabilitation in coordination with interested local and international bodies and organizations.
- - Continuing the previous formal procedures that have been taken for ending recruitment and involvement of children in the armed conflict; while seizing every opportunity to take efforts against this phenomenon at the local, regional and international levels.
- Working on the rehabilitation of the demobilized children and to reintegrate them into the society through vocational training programs, as well as providing them with the necessary skills.

### **Human Rights Organizations:**

- Intensifying efforts to monitor and document cases of child recruitment and use by parties involved in armed conflict in Yemen, and exposing the perpetrators to the public opinion, which would constitute an international pressure to stop such practices that threaten the life and future of the most important segment of the society.

- Exercising more pressure on the legitimate government to grant upon the national organizations interested in the protection of the child rights, the legal capacity that would enable them to file cases against those who violate the rights of a minor, including recruitment and use in armed conflicts.
- - Assisting and supporting the government in the rehabilitation and reintegration programs of the child recruits in the society.