

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## **Yemen: Huthi-loyal forces killing and injuring peaceful protesters as they try to assert control over parts of Yemen**

Testimonies gathered by Amnesty International indicate that Yemeni Central Security Forces loyal to the Huthis used unnecessary and excessive force, including live fire, to crack down on peaceful demonstrations in Ta'iz for four consecutive days starting on Sunday 22 March. At least eight protesters were killed and at least 30 others had gun-fire injuries. More than 279 protesters and bystanders were treated for tear gas inhalation.

According to local health officials, the use of tear gas left some protesters and bystanders in critical condition on Sunday, confirming that one 24-year old male protester suffered cardiac failure due to suffocation and was in a coma and on life support. According to activists and victims, tear gas was used without providing safe route for people to leave the area.

One healthcare professional told Amnesty International: "Three protesters were admitted to the hospital with gunshot wounds to their legs on Sunday, while on Monday alone we received 29 cases of gas suffocation, two of whom were women."

"Meanwhile, on Tuesday, we were overwhelmed and we did not have the adequate medical supplies – 64 were admitted in our hospital alone, 27 of whom had suffered gunshot injuries mostly in their legs, abdomen, necks and heads."

One injured protester, Haytham al-Yousefi, told Amnesty International that he sustained a deep wound in his right leg after the Central Security Forces used tear gas against demonstrators on Sunday. He was injured when the canister ruptured near him causing sharp metal objects to wound his leg. He later required 24 stitches.

The demonstrations in Ta'iz began in the early hours of 22 March when hundreds of people gathered to protest against the de facto takeover of Ta'iz by the Huthi armed group, seizing key installations including the international airport.

## **Consistent targeting of peaceful protesters**

Widespread anti-Huthi protests have rocked Yemen since January 2015 and have been met by patterns of excessive use of force, use of live ammunition, arrests and in some cases [documented](#) by Amnesty International, torture.

According to witnesses' accounts in Ibb, the Huthi armed group cracked down on protests by firing live rounds of ammunition to disperse peaceful anti-Huthi demonstrations on 16 February, which led to the wounding of three protesters.

One protester who was shot gave details of how he sustained his gunshot wound: "There were approximately 500 of us protesting on 16 February in Ibb when the Huthi militias arrived in one armoured vehicle first and then two more vehicles followed. There were roughly 10 armed Huthis, some were dressed in civilian clothing and others in military uniforms. They were shouting their slogan out loud and they started firing. All 10 fired but at least three of them started firing directly at the crowd."

"I was shot in three places and two others were also shot next to me, in fact they were shot seconds after me. I was shot under my heart, left abdomen and right shoulder, the last bullet did not exit like the first two. I had to be rushed to Manar Hospital and then to Ta'iz to the Yemen International Hospital."

And on 21 February, 20-year old Nasr al-Shuja' was killed by members of a Huthi armed group during a protest in Ibb city. According to his family, the bullet entered through his left shoulder, damaging his heart and then exited through his right shoulder. Two other protesters sustained bullet wounds on the same day.

The Huthi armed group, who are now in control of large swathe of Yemen, including the capital, must immediately instruct security forces and its armed men to cease using excessive force and allow peaceful protest. Moreover, these incidents must be urgently and properly investigated by the prosecutor general, and anyone suspected of arbitrary or abusive use of force should be prosecuted in fair trials.

## **Background**

The Huthis are a political movement and armed group of the (northern) Zaidi Shi'a minority which emerged in Sa'ada and who fought a series of wars against the central government during the rule of President 'Ali 'Abdullah Saleh between 2004 and 2010. They are now allegedly targeting their critics and committing human rights abuses akin to those to which they were subjected when 'Ali 'Abdullah Saleh was in power.

The group took over some army and security positions in Sana'a in September 2014. By the third week of January 2015 they had attacked military positions, the Presidential compounds and government buildings. This led to the resignation of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi and his government and the Huthis becoming the de-facto rulers of the capital and other parts of Yemen.

They have been consolidating their hold on Yemen's capital, Sana'a, and the north. They have made substantial advances in the South over the last week, having captured Tai'z and key military camps and they are now close to the southern port of Aden. On 6 February they dissolved parliament and issued a constitutional declaration mandating the creation of a transitional presidential council which will act as a government for an interim period of two years. Meanwhile,

The move effectively ended the (largely unfulfilled) reconciliation power-sharing initiative negotiated by the Gulf Cooperation Council to end the 2011 uprising which ousted President Ali Abdullah Saleh after his 33-year-rule.

The United Nations and international community do not recognize the Huthi administration as the legitimate government of Yemen. They continue to recognize the government of President Hadi, who has been based in Aden since February.