



Justice4Yemen Pact
ميثاق العدالة لليمن

INFORMATIONAL BRIEF

Explosive remnants of war kill, maim civilians in Marib after guns go quiet

MARCH 2024

Introduction

Overall levels of violence in the Yemeni civil war have decreased since a nationwide truce went into effect in April 2022 and remain low despite the truce's formal expiration in October of that year.¹ Unfortunately, this lull in violence has not extended to civilian victims of landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO).

A November 2022 UN OCHA analysis noted that the number of civilians injured and killed by explosive remnants of war increased by 20% since the truce began, compared to the previous six-month period.²

The increased mobility that accompanied the cessation in hostilities led to deadly consequences as civilians returned to homes and land

About the Yemen Human Rights Forensics Lab Plus (YHRFL+)

The goal of the Yemen Human Rights Forensics Lab Plus (YHRFL+) program is to increase recognition and protection of human rights in Yemen by empowering Yemeni civil society to champion justice and accountability through human rights documentation, reporting, and advocacy efforts. The YHRFL+ program is working to systematically document, preserve, corroborate, analyze, and report on evidence, obtained from a variety of sources, of human rights violations committed by all parties involved in the Yemeni conflict. Results of this analysis are summarized and presented in a series of investigative reports focusing on specific identified incidents of human rights violations. YHRFL+ also support efforts by Yemeni CSO partners to carry out strategic advocacy, community outreach, and victim and survivor engagement interventions locally and internationally.

About Justice4Yemen Pact Coalition

The Justice4Yemen Pact is a coalition of human rights organizations and civil society actors that are united for the promotion and protection of human rights in Yemen. The coalition's mission is to advocate for the rights of all Yemeni people, particularly those who are most vulnerable and marginalized. The coalition is committed to addressing the systemic human rights violations that have been plaguing Yemen through years of conflict and violence. The Justice4Yemen Pact works to empower Yemeni people to claim their rights, raise awareness of violations, and advocate for justice and accountability at local, national, and international levels. The Justice4Yemen Pact is guided by the principles of respect for human dignity, equality, justice, and non-discrimination. The coalition believes that by working together, its members can end impunity, provide meaningful support and redress for victims, and contribute to a more peaceful, just, and prosperous future for Yemen.

Acknowledgements

The YHRFL+ program thanks its partner organization the Marib Dam Foundation (MDF) for their work documenting civilian casualties from landmines and unexploded ordnance, which is featured in this report.

¹ Yemen Conflict Observatory, ACLED, available at: <https://acleddata.com/yemen-conflict-observatory/>

² "Yemen: Explosive war remnants claim more civilian lives," UN News, November 15, 2022, <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2022/11/1115562>

littered with landmines and UXO.³

Children have been particularly hard hit by these weapon types: According to a March 2023 report from Save the Children, child casualties from landmines and UXO increased from 1 every 5 days in 2018, to 1 every 2 days in 2022, even as overall direct child casualties decreased.⁴ More than half of all child casualties in 2022 were caused by landmines and UXO, the report noted.⁵ Furthermore, almost half of all landmine and UXO incidents involving children were deadly.⁶ “When children see something shiny or interesting, they can’t help themselves from touching it. That’s why so many children have been killed or injured in unexploded ordnance incidents,” remarked Save the Children’s former country director in June 2022.⁷

Yemen has one of the highest rates in the world of contamination from landmines and UXO, with estimates that at least 1 million mines have been planted since the beginning of the current conflict.⁸ Governorates that have seen extensive fighting are the most polluted, including Al-Hudaydah, Al-Bayda, Al-Dhalea, Hajjah, Marib, Sa’ada, Shabwa and Taiz.⁹ Although Marib governorate—particularly the rural outskirts of Marib city—was heavily contaminated following two main rounds of fighting between the internationally recognized government and the Houthis starting in 2015 and 2020, the governorate has received little attention regarding the civilian toll exacted by landmines and UXO.¹⁰

MDF Documents 131 Civilian Casualties from Landmines and UXO in Marib

The Marib Dam Foundation (MDF), a local development NGO, has helped address this gap with an investigative report issued in March 2023. The report documented 131 civilian casualties in Marib, including 28 deaths and 103 injuries, from landmines and UXO from January 2020 to February 2023, based on interviews with victims and witnesses, field visits to incident locations, and a review of reports from local authorities.¹¹ MDF highlighted several important features of the landmine and UXO threat to civilians in Marib.

First, the heightened vulnerability of certain victim types. Children made up 49% of documented casualties in the report.

Shepherds, farmers, and day laborers are at heightened risk due to the mobile nature of their work and together made up 65% of documented casualties (these professions include children, as do the following victim types).



MDF delivers a training on psychological and legal support to mine victims in Marib in January 2024. *Source: MDF*

³ Ibid.

⁴ “Watching Our Every Step: The Deadly Legacy of Explosive Ordnance for Children in Yemen,” Save the Children, 2023, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Watching-Our-Every-Step-The-Deadly-Legacy-of-Explosive-Ordnance-for-Children-in-Yemen.pdf/>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “Yemen: Explosive remnants of war the biggest killer of children since the truce began,” Save the Children, June 30, 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-explosive-remnants-war-biggest-killer-children-truce-began>

⁸ “Yemen’s explosive contamination among the world’s worst: ICRC,” France24, November 9, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230911-yemen-s-explosives-contamination-among-world-s-worst-icrc>

⁹ “Yemen,” UNMAS, available at: <https://www.unmas.org/en/programmes/yemen>

¹⁰ “The Sowing of Death,” Marib Dam Foundation for Social Development, March 31, 2023, <http://tinyurl.com/at6b54ks>

¹¹ Ibid.

IDPs, who were frequently wounded and killed after returning home following a period of displacement, accounted for 18% of the documented casualties. Travelers, forced by conflict-related road closures to use dangerous desert routes, accounted for 9% of the documented casualties. The findings on the vulnerability of these victim types are broadly in line with other reporting on landmines and UXO during the Yemeni civil war.¹²

Second, the MDF report highlighted the deadly ingenuity employed by mine-makers. In Marib, they have turned anti-vehicle mines into anti-personnel mines by utilizing a device called a “pedal,” made of locally available materials including brass and steel plates, wood, wires, and irrigation pipes. When a victim steps on the pedal, the anti-vehicle landmine explodes. Mine makers have also disguised landmines as environmental features like rocks to decrease the chance of detection.



Left: Mines disguised as rocks in Marib. Middle: A locally produced “pedal.” Right: Individual selling mines in Yemen. Source: MDF

Third, MDF noted that poverty has pushed some civilians to collect and sell mines in Marib. This poses an obvious danger to the individual, as well as their families if they store mines at home. Furthermore, this illicit market facilitates the continued use of mines in the conflict and can lead to mines falling into the hands of criminal groups.

This current report profiles four cases in Marib documented by MDF in 2023, following the period covered in its investigative report. These cases are indicative of two well-documented, common, and ongoing patterns of civilian injury and death from landmines and UXO in Yemen: children playing with remnants of war and shepherds who fall victim to landmines while tending to their flocks.

Case 1 – Hussein, 13 years old – al-Wadi Directorate

Hussein set out from home on June 3, 2023 to fetch water for his family from a nearby gas station. As he was waiting in line alongside five other children, a child picked up a 23mm shell from the ground and threw it among the children waiting in line for water. The shell struck a solid object and exploded, causing shrapnel injuries to all five children. Hussein was injured most severely. He was transported to the hospital and treated for fractures in his left leg, as well as lacerations to both legs. Today, he suffers from limited mobility in his left leg and requires further medical treatment.

Case 2 – Abdul Azeez, 12 years old – al-Wadi Directorate

Abdul Azeez was spending time with his uncle on June 9, 2023 at a car wash where his uncle worked. Around 2pm Abdul Azeez went to the bathroom behind the car wash, where he found a 23mm shell lying on the ground.

¹² For the vulnerability of children, see the Save the Children reports referenced above; for shepherds, farmers, and travelers, see “Mines: A Nightmare that Chases Yemenis,” Coalition of 9 Yemeni NGOs, April 2022, available at: <https://dtglobal.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/USW-DTI/Ecy15CZMW1JPI1B1tn1orLIBDjYixjRbqntQ9X9yosY7qQ?e=W0lpQj>; for IDPs, see “Explosive Weapons, Contamination, and Risk Education in Yemen,” Handicap International, March 2020, https://www.hi.org/sn_uploads/document/IB-2-Contamination-Yemen.pdf and “Watching Our Every Step: The Deadly Legacy of Explosive Ordnance for Children in Yemen,” Save the Children, 2023, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Watching-Our-Every-Step-The-Deadly-Legacy-of-Explosive-Ordnance-for-Children-in-Yemen.pdf/>

He began playing with the shell and struck the bottom of the munition on a rock as he was holding it, causing it to explode. Hearing the explosion and Abdul Azeez's cries, his uncle ran to find him, then rushed him to a nearby hospital where he received first aid. Abdul Azeez was then transported to Marib General Hospital, where he was treated for serious injuries to his right hand, including the amputation of his pointer finger, as well as a brain contusion and bleeding from his head.

Case 3 – Najia, 36 years old – Harib Directorate

On the afternoon of May 9, 2023 Najia went out to tend to a flock of goats. Village residents heard an explosion, and after approaching the direction of the sound, they found Najia lying on the ground approximately 2km from her home. She was already dead, having succumbed to her injuries after stepping on a landmine. According to Najia's father and husband, their home is located near a frontline between the Houthis and the Giants Brigade forces, and they said the Houthis were responsible for planting landmines in the area.

Case 4 – Suada, 23 years old – Raghwan Directorate

On February 23, 2023, as Suada was returning in the afternoon from tending to a flock of goats, she triggered a landmine that exploded and severely injured her left hand. Flood waters had previously washed the mine away from another area and deposited it where she was working in the Wadi Samra valley. Suada was transported to the hospital where her left pointer finger was amputated, and fragments of shrapnel were extracted from her stomach.

Legal Analysis

In 1998 Yemen ratified The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. The Mine Ban Treaty prohibits the use of anti-personnel landmines and requires states parties to destroy stockpiled anti-personnel landmines and eliminate planted mines within ten years, as well as mark and protect mined areas to prevent civilians from accessing them until such a time as the mines can be destroyed.¹³

The internationally recognized government of Yemen has applied for, and received, four extension requests to defer its commitments under Article 5 of the Mine Ban Treaty.¹⁴ The latest extension was granted in 2022, providing Yemen until the end of March 2028 to meet its obligations.¹⁵ In its latest extension request, the government wrote it was still working on completing its objectives from the previous extension request, mainly to establish a baseline mine contamination estimate.¹⁶ "Prospects for significant progress in survey or clearance during the extension period are unclear," wrote Mine Action Review in 2023, which awarded Yemen a rating of "poor."¹⁷

In the north, the Houthi de-facto authorities exercise government-like functions and claim to abide by the Mine Ban Treaty as well as other international treaties signed by previous Yemeni governments.¹⁸ A memorandum of understanding drafted between the Houthis and three demining NGOs, which would enable these organizations to clear mines in Houthi-held areas, remains unsigned as of August 2023.¹⁹ Various NGO and media reports have

¹³ The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, Article 5

¹⁴ "Clearing the Mines 2023: Yemen," Mine Action Review, 2023, https://www.mineactionreview.org/assets/downloads/Yemen_Clearing_the_Mines_2023.pdf

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Response from the Houthi De facto Authorities to the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen, May 30, 2019, available at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/GEE-Yemen/2019_Houthis_Response_list_of_issues_AR.pdf

¹⁹ "Clearing the Mines 2023: Yemen," Mine Action Review, 2023, https://www.mineactionreview.org/assets/downloads/Yemen_Clearing_the_Mines_2023.pdf

attributed responsibility for widespread mine laying activity to Houthi forces.²⁰ In September 2019, the UN Human Rights Council's Group of Eminent Experts wrote that it had "reasonable grounds to believe that the Houthi-Saleh fighters used anti-personnel and anti-vehicle landmines in violation of international humanitarian law, notably in the way the mines were placed in unmarked locations frequented by civilians, with no warning, which rendered their use indiscriminate."²¹

Recommendations

To the
**international and
national NGOs working
in Marib:**

- **Conduct awareness raising campaigns for families and children regarding the dangers of UXO.**
- 11% of the casualties documented by MDF in its March 2023 report occurred because of children playing with UXO. Other reports have also highlighted the fact that children in Yemen are frequently injured and killed while playing with UXO.²² "A low level of societal awareness regarding the dangers [of landmines and UXO] is one of the reasons leading children to fall victim to, and play with, landmines and remnants of war," noted MDF in March 2023.²³

To the
**internationally
recognized government
of Yemen:**

- **Provide assistance for the care and rehabilitation, and social and economic reintegration, of mine and UXO victims, as stipulated in Article 6 of the Mine Ban Treaty.**
- Notably, none of the children victims interviewed in a March 2023 Save the Children report, who were currently enrolled at school, said they had received any formal support at school.²⁴ If the internationally recognized government is unable to meet these obligations, it should seek assistance from other states parties, the United Nations system, and regional and international organizations to meet them, as stipulated in Article 6 of the Mine Ban Treaty.

To all
**parties to the conflict,
especially the
Houthis/Ansar Allah:**

- **Cease using landmines and cooperate with the UN and humanitarian mine action agencies to facilitate the clearing of contaminated areas.**

Contact

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²⁰ See, for example, "Yemen: Houthi-Saleh Forces Using Landmines," Human Rights Watch, April 20, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/20/yemen-houthi-saleh-forces-using-landmines>; "Land mines will be hidden killer in Yemen decades after war," Associated Press, December 24, 2018, <https://apnews.com/article/bce0a80324d040f09843ceb3e4e45c1e>

²¹ Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014, Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts as submitted to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights - A/HCR/42/17," United Nations Human Rights Council, August 9, 2019, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/A_HRC_42_CRP_1.pdf, paragraph 209

²² See, for example, "Yemen: Explosive remnants of war the biggest killer of children since the truce began," Save the Children, June 30, 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-explosive-remnants-war-biggest-killer-children-truce-began>

²³ "The Sowing of Death," Marib Dam Foundation for Social Development, March 31, 2023, <http://tinyurl.com/at6b54ks>

²⁴ "Watching Our Every Step: The Deadly Legacy of Explosive Ordnance for Children in Yemen," Save the Children, 2023, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Watching-Our-Every-Step-The-Deadly-Legacy-of-Explosive-Ordnance-for-Children-in-Yemen.pdf/>