HuMENA Condemns Houthi Arrests of UN Staff in Yemen, Warns of Grave Threat to Humanitarian Work

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HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement strongly condemns the security raids carried out by the Ansar Allah (Houthis) group in Sana'a and Hodeidah, which targeted the offices of the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF, and led to the arrest of sixteen current and former staff members. Among those detained is Ms. Luna Shukri, Deputy Representative of UNICEF in Yemen (Jordanian national), in blatant violation of the immunity guaranteed to United Nations personnel.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has denounced these arrests, and the Office of the UN Envoy to Yemen warned that targeting humanitarian workers gravely threatens the safety of UN staff and undermines the independence of humanitarian action in the country.

Reports further indicate that some of the detainees have been held since 2021 without trial, in clear violation of Yemeni law, which prohibits arbitrary detention and requires judicial review within a defined period.

HuMENA also denounces the inflammatory statements made by senior Houthi official Mohammed al-Bukhaiti, who labelled the detainees as "spies for Israel" and accused the United Nations of collusion. Such baseless accusations amount to public incitement, put the detainees' lives at risk, and reflect a broader pattern of criminalizing humanitarian and human rights work under false pretexts of "espionage" and "treason."

These actions constitute clear violations of international law, including Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 71 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions (1977), and the 1994 UN Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel.

HuMENA holds the Houthi group fully responsible for these violations and calls for:

- The immediate and unconditional release of all detained UN staff and others.
- An end to attacks on the premises and personnel of international organizations.
- An independent international investigation to ensure accountability and end impunity.
- The activation of international protection mechanisms and the adoption of deterrent measures against those responsible.

These violations add to a long record of grave abuses, including the killing of WFP staff member Ahmed Ba'alawi under torture in Houthi custody, a crime that remains unpunished. Targeting UN

staff sets a dangerous precedent that threatens the neutrality and independence of humanitarian work in Yemen and exacerbates one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

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