

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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September 12, 2018

Major General Abdulhakeem al-Maweri
Minister of Interior
Ministry of Interior
Sanaa, Yemen

Subject: Treatment of Detainees

Your Excellency Minister al-Maweri,

We write to seek information regarding any steps the Ministry of Interior has taken to release arbitrarily held individuals, to improve treatment in detention facilities, and to hold those responsible for abuse accountable. We also seek your help facilitating access for Human Rights Watch to visit detention facilities in Sanaa and Hodeida.

Human Rights Watch has repeatedly documented members of the security forces and others working for the Sanaa-based authorities arbitrarily detaining, mistreating in custody, and forcibly disappearing people since September 2014. Former detainees have also described poor living conditions, including lack of food and access to health care, restricted or refused access to family members and international organizations, and a lack of a defined process for challenging detention or reporting mistreatment.

Human Rights Watch has documented additional cases of alleged torture and the holding of arbitrarily held detainees for prisoner exchanges or extortion. The United Nations Security Council Panel of Experts also found that individuals working for the Political Security Office were “profiting from detentions” and documented individuals who remained detained largely for the purpose of prisoner exchanges.

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As you know, torture and other deliberate mistreatment of detainees committed in the context of an armed conflict are war crimes. Taking hostages – seizing someone or detaining them and threatening to kill, injure, or continue to detain them to compel a third party to do or abstain from doing something as a condition of release or for the safety of the person – is also a war crime.

While the Sanaa-based authorities may take appropriate measures to address security concerns during the armed conflict, Human Rights Watch urges authorities to: safeguard the rights of everyone in detention; immediately release all those held arbitrarily, prioritizing the most vulnerable, like children, the elderly, and those in poor health; grant family members, lawyers, doctors, and independent monitors immediate access to detention sites to reduce the risk of abuse; and appropriately punish individuals responsible for war crimes.

We seek information on any steps taken to carry out these recommendations or otherwise improve human rights conditions by September 22, 2018 so that we may reflect the Ministry's position in our upcoming reporting:

1. Have any investigations been undertaken by the Ministry or other Sanaa-based authorities into allegations of torture or other mistreatment of detainees? If so, please describe how many investigations have been undertaken and the results of these investigations. If any of these investigations have led to disciplinary measures or criminal prosecutions please provide specific information on the actions taken and the outcome.
2. Please list the locations which the Sanaa-based authorities are currently using as detention facilities, how many men, women, and children are being held in each location, and how many of these detainees have had charges brought against them and the nature of the charges. Please include which facilities are under Ministry of Interior control.
3. Which of the following facilities fall under Interior Ministry authority: in Sanaa, Central Prison, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), and al-Thawra, and Habra pretrial detention facilities; and in Hodeida, Central Prison? What steps have been taken by you or Vice Minister Maj. Gen. Abdulhakem Hashim al-Khaiwani to investigate allegations of mistreatment, appropriately punish individuals responsible for abuse, and release individuals held arbitrarily?

4. Which of these informal facilities remain in use as detention sites: in Sanaa, the National Security Bureau, the Political Security Office, Zain al-Abideen mosque; and in Hodeida, the Political Security Office, the Officer's Club, and the Citadel? Please clarify who runs each of these informal facilities, and to whom each facility's director reports. What steps have been taken to ensure those responsible for abuses are appropriately punished?

Sincerely,

Michael Page
Deputy Director
Middle East and North Africa
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*CC: Alya al-Sha'abi
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