

Executive Summary



Yemen's West Coast Fishing Communities:

Documenting Harm, Needs, and Priorities for Redress



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Introduction

Fishing communities along Yemen's west coast have been severely affected by internationally wrongful acts by multiple actors.¹ This report highlights their needs and their right to seek reparations, drawing on interviews with victims to identify both immediate and longer-term priorities and to underscore the relevance of reparations as a response.

Although avenues for reparations for victims of international law violations in Yemen are currently absent, documenting these harms and needs is essential. Such documentation can serve as a founda-

tional step toward broader documentation efforts, reparations processes, and related claims.²

By strengthening understanding of patterns of harm affecting fishermen and their communities, this report seeks to support more informed engagement by the IRG, the Houthis, members of the Saudi/UAE-led coalition, Eritrea, and the international community. This includes informing the allocation of appropriate human, technical, and financial resources for reparations programs and other forms of meaningful redress.

Methodology

This report was prepared jointly by Global Rights Compliance, Musaala Organization for Human Rights, the Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (Ras'd Coalition), and SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties. The findings are based on open-source research conducted between October 2024 and December 2025, and field research carried out between May and October 2025. The research followed, and where appropriate adapted, the Reparations Research Framework developed by GRC.³

Field teams conducted 84 interviews with primary sources, including survivors and direct victims, relatives of victims, and other relevant stakeholders, using trauma-informed practices. Interviewees were asked to recount incidents causing harm, identify responsible parties where known, and describe the nature and extent of the harm suffered. Discussions also covered any assistance or reparations received, as well as victims' perceptions of justice and their preferred forms of redress.

Community in focus:

Economic activity along Yemen's coastline is largely centered on small-scale, artisanal fisheries, which form the backbone of local livelihoods and food consumption.⁴ Fishing communities play a vital role in supporting local economies and contributing to food security,⁵ particularly in the context of the humanitarian crisis currently facing Yemen.⁶ The focus on fishing communities along Yemen's west coast reflects the severity of the harms they have experienced, as well as the extent to which these abuses remain undocumented.

¹ This submission focuses on the actions and responsibility of Saudi Arabia, the IRG, the Houthis and Eritrea. Other actors, including UAE-backed Tariq Saleh forces as non-state armed group controlling the west coast, may also bear responsibility for violations of fishing rights. Based on the information obtained through interviews for this submission, however, those potential responsibilities are not examined here but would require further inquiry.

² GRC Reparations Guide.

³ Section 3 of GRC [Reparations Guide](#) provides guidance on the practical steps practitioners can take to conduct reparations research, in particular within the context of starvation and starvation-related violations (ESCR), but also more broadly. The main purpose of reparations is to acknowledge and repair the harm caused to victims by an internationally wrongful act or omission. This research aimed at documenting the commission of internationally wrongful acts, identifying the main responsible actors and the victims affected, assessing the nature and extent of harms suffered by direct and indirect victims (physical, material, and moral harm), and assessing the victims' needs and preferences for reparations and other forms of justice.

⁴ Press release. New World Bank Project Will Support Sustainable Fisheries in Yemen. (2022).

⁵ 'Fish is a key staple of the Yemeni diet, particularly of the coastal communities and food represents 60 to 70 percent of poor households' consumption expenditures.' UNDP Project Document Yemen, Sustainable Fisheries Development (SFISH) in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, (2022);

⁶ *ibid*.

Fishermen in the Al- Khawkhah area unload their catch after a fishing trip in the Red Sea. Photo taken on July 19, 2025



Key patterns of conduct harming fishing communities:

Protracted conflict in Yemen, prolonged economic crisis, and persistent insecurity, including as a result of patterns of conduct violating international law, have made fishing increasingly dangerous and prevented many fishermen from going to sea, undermining livelihoods and access to food.⁷ These impacts have contributed to displacement, food insecurity, and the erosion of traditional ways of life, with lasting consequences for community well-being.

After the Houthis seized Sana'a and expanded into areas such as al-Hudaydah and the western coast in late 2014, conflict intensified with the Saudi/UAE-led coalition's military campaign beginning in March 2015.⁸ Between 2015 and 2022, airstrikes carried out by the Saudi/UAE-led Coalition⁹ repeatedly killed or injured fishermen and destroyed boats and critical infrastructure, including ports, landing sites, and processing facilities. The resulting inse-

curity further restricted access to fishing areas¹⁰ and forced many fishermen to relocate in search of safety.¹¹

Alongside these aerial attacks, years of hostilities along the west coast, particularly in southern al-Hudaydah, have left the region severely contaminated with mines and other explosive remnants of war, largely laid by the Houthis.¹² These landmines and sea mines pose threats both at sea and when fishermen attempt to reach fishing areas via mined roads.¹³ Even during the period of reduced hostilities since the 2022 truce, civilian casualties from landmines and unexploded ordnance have occurred on a near-weekly basis.¹⁴

Beyond these threats, Yemeni fishermen have been systematically subjected to arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and abduction at sea by Eritrean forces, alongside the armed conflict and

7 Paul Ireland, Norwegian Refugee Council. *Yemen: How fishing communities are fighting back* (2019).

8 The coalition included Qatar, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, and Senegal. The Saudi-led coalition also relies on local Yemeni forces to carry out most ground operations. These allied units comprise a mix of Yemeni army units, tribal forces, Islamist militias, and southern separatists opposed to Houthi rule. Jeremy M. Sharp, *Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention*, Congressional Research Service (2017). https://www.forumarmstrade.org/uploads/1/9/0/8/19082495/crs_yemen_report_march_2017.pdf.

9 Yemen Data Project. *Saudi Coalition airwar 2015-2022*.

10 Paul Ireland, Norwegian Refugee Council. *Yemen: How fishing communities are fighting back* (2019).

11 *Developing Yemen's Fishing Industry*. Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies (2020).

12 Site UN Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement.

13 Paul Ireland, Norwegian Refugee Council. *Yemen: How fishing communities are fighting back* (2019).

14 ACLED Data, *West Coast Yemen* (2023).

extending back to the period before its outbreak.¹⁵ These detentions have often been accompanied by torture and ill-treatment, inadequate access to clean water and food, confiscation of boats and fishing equipment, and forced labor. Since the outbreak of the conflict, such incidents have reportedly increased,¹⁶ while fishermen have received minimal protection from either the internationally recognized government of Yemen (IRG) or the Houthis in areas under their control.

More recently, the escalation of hostilities in the Red Sea since October 2023, following Houthi attacks on maritime targets in the Red Sea in response to the Israeli military's conduct in Gaza¹⁷, and subsequent Israeli, US, and UK strikes in Yemen throughout 2024 and 2025,¹⁸ has further exacerbated the already precarious conditions facing fishing communities.¹⁹

Taken together, these patterns of conduct have driven displacement among fishing communities along Yemen's west coast. Many fishermen and their families have been forced to leave coastal areas due to insecurity and the cumulative loss of livelihoods. This has further weakened access to food, income, and community support systems, deepening existing vulnerabilities.²⁰

These patterns of harm and resulting displacement have been compounded by broader challenges, including the economic and food crisis, generalized insecurity, reductions in humanitarian assistance, overfishing,²¹ high prices, fuel shortages,²² restrictions on access to fishing zones,²³ climate change,²⁴ impact of bottom trawling by fishing companies,²⁵ natural disasters, and pollution from oil spills,²⁶ as well as by violations of international law by other actors beyond those addressed in this report. While this report acknowledges the cumulative impact of these factors, it does not seek to address each in detail.

International law violations harmed Yemen's fishing communities

Various parties to the conflict in Yemen, including the Saudi/UAE-led coalition, the IRG and the Houthis, as well as other actors, such as Eritrea, have been implicated in conduct that may amount to violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, in some cases rising to the level of serious or grave breaches. These violations have caused significant harm and suffering to Yemeni fishermen and fishing communities along the west coast.

As a result, affected individuals have suffered long-lasting and severe physical, psychological, and socioeconomic impacts. They have been repeatedly deprived of their lives, liberty, health, livelihoods, and access to food. Many have been killed or injured, displaced, or left unable to sustain their livelihoods, secure adequate food, or repair damaged property and infrastructure.

15 Other parties, including the Saudi-led coalition, the Houthis, the Giants Brigade, and the National Resistance/Tariq Saleh's Forces have separately been implicated in the arbitrary arrests and detentions of fishermen. The experiences documented in this report, however, primarily concern detention by Eritrean forces, as reported by 33 of the 36 fishermen interviewed.

16 See, for example, Mwatana for Human Rights. *A plethora of abuses in the heart of the sea. Violations by the Eritrean Naval forces on Yemeni fishermen in the Red Sea.* (2023).

17 ACLED. Q&A: Why Are Yemen's Houthis Attacking Ships in the Red Sea? Analysis of Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea and their implications on regional escalation. Luca Nevola (2024)

18 ACLED Data, West Coast Yemen (2023).

19 IDMC. Country profile. Yemen.

20 Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies. *Developing Yemen's Fishing Industry* (2020).

21 The New Arab *A precarious livelihood in Yemen... Hodeidah fishermen caught in the nets of mines and diesel traders.* Mohamed Rageh (2021).

22 NRC. *Yemen Fishing in the middle of a war* (2021).

23 E.g. Interviewee No. 100180A, 20 October 2025; See also Paul Ireland, Norwegian Refugee Council. *Yemen: How fishing communities are fighting back* (2019).

24 *Fisheries and the right to food in the context of climate change* Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Michael Fakhr (2024).

25 The Sector Network Rural Development Africa. *Fisheries – A Key Lever for Change in Yemen* (2025).

26 NRC. *Yemen Fishing in the middle of a war* (2021) 'A polluted marine environment has destroyed the artisanal fishing sector and displaced thousands of fishermen along with their families.'

Redress has not been provided

Despite the severity of the patterns of conduct described in this report and the harms arising from them, most fishermen who were victims of such abuses, like many victims in Yemen, have yet to receive any form of reparation or recognition. Across the 84 interviews conducted with members of Yemen's west coast fishing community, experts, and other stakeholders, no indication was found that Saudi Arabia, other members of the Saudi-led Coalition, the IRG, the Houthis or Eritrea had provided reparations to those harmed by their conduct.

While the Saudi/UAE-led Coalition, the IRG and the Houthis have established mechanisms to investigate and address civilian harm during the Yemeni conflict, these have failed to align with the UN Guiding Principles on reparations.

For example, these mechanisms have addressed only a limited number of cases; they have not been independent, impartial or effective; they have failed to acknowledge wrongdoing, lacked transparency, and have not conducted genuine investigations.²⁷ Interviewed victims of Eritrean conduct similarly reported that they had not received any form of reparation and were unaware of any mechanism for redress.

More broadly, the absence of a coordinated national framework to protect fishermen, preserve evidence of violations of international law, and provide accessible pathways to reparation, including by advocating for and ensuring reparation from all relevant actors responsible for these patterns of harm, constitutes a significant institutional gap. This gap undermines individual recovery, weakens the resilience of Yemen's traditional fisheries sector, and contributes to prolonged food insecurity in coastal communities.

Members of the fishing community's reparative needs and preferences

While expressed in their own voice and without reference to specific international legal frameworks, members of the fishing community affected by the documented patterns of conduct expressed clear and consistent needs and preferences for reparations. These included demands for restitution and financial compensation, support to address physical and mental health impacts, legal accountability, and forward-looking measures like better regulation and educational opportunities. Some also mentioned memorialization of victims. While addressing these needs is crucial for the healing of these communities, many emphasized that their foremost demand was the end of the ongoing conflict, which they viewed as fundamental to any sustainable improvement in their situation.

Primary preferences expressed by those interviewed included restitution of boats or financial compensation. Many sought compensation to cover losses, particularly the value of confiscated or destroyed boats and fishing equipment, which they viewed as essential for restoring their livelihoods and enabling them to provide for their families. In addition, fishermen emphasized the importance of restoring their previous living conditions and receiving sufficient support to rebuild their lives

following violence and displacement. Many also highlighted the importance of addressing both the mental and physical health impacts of their experiences.

Legal accountability was another aspect of the reparations preferences expressed. Fishermen called for those responsible for their harms to be investigated and held accountable, referring to the range of actors involved. They stressed the need for this as a means to prevent recurrence.

Those interviewed also identified forward-looking measures to better protect and fulfill their rights. They included stronger regulation of the fishing industry, particularly to prevent destructive practices by foreign vessels in Yemeni territorial waters, as well as expanded educational opportunities for children.

Many expressed a deep sense of abandonment by the authorities, reporting that they had been left to face these harms and losses alone. They pointed to a lack of effective advocacy or support by local authorities and fishermen's associations. Some expressed skepticism about the likelihood of ever receiving justice or redress.

²⁷ Just security. Kristine Beckerle and Ali Jameel. *The Urgency of Reparations for Civilians in Yemen* (2022).

Conclusion – Towards Recognition and Redress

The harms faced by fishing communities along Yemen's west coast have had lasting effects and require greater recognition and response. All involved parties have obligations under international law. Preventing further harm, acknowledging what has occurred, and ensuring access to accountability and reparations are essential steps for those affected. The findings of this report underscore the need for meaningful action to provide adequate reparations and to support affected communities in rebuilding their lives. Continued documentation, monitoring and engagement with affected communities remain critical to ensuring that victims' experiences inform more effective responses and that their rights to truth, justice, and reparations are upheld.

While this report focuses on fishing communities, these findings point to a broader need to center victims in discussions on Yemen and to ensure access to reparations for those affected more widely. This is particularly important given the scale and persistence of the harms documented.



Fishing boats at the fishermen's harbor in the Yakhtal area of Al-Mukha district. The photo was taken on July 9, 2025.



Global Rights Compliance (GRC) is an international law foundation dedicated to promoting accountability through the innovative application of international law. Operating in conflict-affected and high-risk regions globally, our lawyers, investigators and development specialists combine legal expertise with extensive practical experience in the field to deliver mobile support to national and international investigations, prosecutions, and transitional justice initiatives. Through our partnerships with governments, international institutions, businesses and civil society, we strive to strengthen legal systems to achieve justice and seek redress for affected communities.

منظمة مساءلة لحقوق الإنسان
Musaala Organization For Human Rights



Musaala Organization for Human Rights is a Yemeni Youth led NGO based in Marib Governorate, working in defending and protecting human rights through monitoring and documenting human rights violations, supporting and redressing their victims, and holding accountable those responsible for these violations in order to stop these violations and ensure that they are not repeated.

التحالف اليمني لرصد
انتهاكات حقوق الإنسان

Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring
Human Rights Violations



Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (Ras'd Coalition) is a Yemeni non-governmental organization. Rasd Coalition was established in January 2015 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.



SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties is an independent, non-profit human rights organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights, with a particular focus on contexts related to armed conflict and political transition, especially in Yemen. The organization operates in accordance with international human rights standards and international humanitarian law, and seeks to contribute to building societies grounded in justice, the rule of law, and respect for human dignity.

Cover Photo: Fishermen unpack their nets in the Al-Jashah area of Al- Khawkhah after a fishing trip in the Red Sea. The photo was taken on March 3, 2024.