The Yemeni Bahá’í community traces its roots to the inception of the Bahá’í Faith in the mid-nineteenth century. In recent decades, the number of Bahá’ís has grown as various segments of Yemeni society have learned about and become attracted to the Bahá’í teachings. Most significantly, a group of Yemeni tribesmen discovered the Bahá’í Faith on the Internet and began following the Bahá’í teachings independently. They invited many of their friends and other members of their tribes to their activities. Subsequently, members of Yemeni tribes, including some of their prominent figures, have increasingly identified themselves as Bahá’ís and have been striving to apply its ideals to their individual and collective lives. Although accurate statistics are not available, it is estimated that there are now a few thousand Yemeni Bahá’ís. All are loyal citizens to their country, representing its rich and diverse culture, and living in both urban and rural settings, including cities such as Sana’a, Taiz, Hudaydah, Ebb, Aden, Mukalla, Dhale, Shabwa, and the Socotra Islands.

Despite living through a turbulent period of civil conflict in Yemen, the Bahá’ís have refused to side with one group or another and have instead endeavoured to serve all people, placing particular emphasis on youth who are eager to dedicate their energies to the regeneration of their society through service to all. Bahá’ís have notably contributed to the betterment of Yemen in various fields including construction, medicine, tribal reconciliation, education, humanitarian, and disaster relief. Moreover, representatives of the Yemeni Bahá’í community have met with hundreds of government officials, tribal elders, university professors, journalists, human rights activists, and diplomats, to further strengthen their ties with society and to explain their non-partisan concerns for the welfare of each and all of their fellow citizens.

**Latest developments**

Six Bahá’ís—Mr. Hamed bin Haydara, Mr. Waleed Ayyash, Mr. Akram Ayyash, Mr. Kayvan Ghaderi, Mr. Badiullah Sanai, and Mr. Wael al-Arieghie—were finally released by the Houthi authorities in July 2020. The release came after years of United Nations independent human rights experts, UN bodies and the international community, as well as human rights activists around the world, consistently calling on the Houthi authorities to release the Bahá’ís. Mr. Haydara had been first arrested in 2013, Mr. Ghaderi in 2016, and the other four were arrested in 2017.

In March 2020, in a televised speech, the president of the Houthi Supreme Political Council, Mr. Mahdi Al-Mashat, called for the pardon of Mr. Haydara (who had been found guilty of a range of spurious crimes, which are detailed below, and who was sentenced to death) and for his release as well as that of the five other Bahá’ís. The United Nations began to facilitate protracted negotiations with various Houthi authorities which, after several months, led to their release.

The Bahá’ís are innocent of the charges brought against them. The six individuals released from prison did not wish to leave Yemen – it was a condition of their release.
A recent court hearing is further evidence of this pattern. In August 2020, at the latest hearing for the 24 Bahá’í Yemenis charged with spurious crimes by the authorities, which included the five Bahá’ís released with Mr. Haydara, the court declared the five as “fugitives” despite the Houthi authorities being themselves responsible for the releases. The court and the prosecutor later also pressured their bailors to compel them to appear at a forthcoming court session – knowing that if they returned they would be sent back to jail.

The release of the six Bahá’ís with the obligation to leave Yemen, and the subsequent attempts to declare them as “fugitives” and to pressure their bailors to return them to the country and thus to jail, clearly illustrate that these releases in no way suggest the situation of the Bahá’ís in Yemen has improved. A background of incidents—including ongoing cases facing dozens of other Bahá’ís—further demonstrates this fact.

**Background incidents**

A review of the arrests, detentions, trials and other experiences of the six recently-released Bahá’ís—as well as accusations and legal proceedings still facing dozens more—is critical to appreciating the scale of harassment that Bahá’ís have experienced in Yemen since 2013 and especially since the Houthis became the de facto authorities in Sana’a in 2014/15.

Although the Yemeni Bahá’í community has maintained cordial relations with the authorities and Yemeni society in general over the years, the Bahá’í community has also faced challenges, which are sharply accelerating. For example, in 2008, under the Presidency of Mr. Abdullah Ali Saleh, authorities detained six Bahá’ís in connection with their faith and eventually deported two of them. Later, in December 2013, Mr. Hamed Kamal bin Haydara was imprisoned by the authorities in Sana’a and was accused of various unfounded charges including acting as a spy for Israel.¹

In August 2016, the Houthi-Saleh authorities in Sana’a arrested over 60 men, women, and children, at an educational conference organized by the Nida Foundation for Development and the Bahá’í community of Yemen. The authorities also raided the homes of Bahá’ís and seized their phones and documents, including passports, and pressured relatives and friends to pay for the prisoners’ release.²

In April 2017, Houthi authorities called for the arrest of over 25 Bahá’ís under similar accusations such as “showing kindness” and “displaying rectitude of conduct in order to attract people to their Faith”. Reports indicated that many on the arrest list were prominent members of the Bahá’í community.

Twenty-four of these individuals were recently tried in absentia, in August 2020, at the same hearing during which the released Bahá’ís were branded “fugitives.” Five of those released are in fact among the 24 still facing charges – an absurdity that demonstrates the perilousness of the general situation facing the Bahá’ís. The trial began in September 2018 during which only the

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judge, the prosecutor, and other court officials were present. The Bahá’ís being charged nor their lawyers were informed of the session until after it had occurred.

On 2 January 2018, the Specialized Criminal Court in Sana’a issued a ruling, unprecedented in the persecution of the Bahá’ís in Yemen, sentencing Mr. Hamed bin Haydara to death due to his religious beliefs. (This was the ruling which Mr. Mahdí al-Mashat called to be pardoned in 2020.) The judge furthermore called for the dissolution of all Bahá’í assemblies, thereby placing the other Bahá’í prisoners, as well as the Bahá’í community as a whole, in imminent danger. The prosecution during that hearing continued to make absurd and wide-ranging accusations against the Bahá’í Faith clearly stemming from religious prejudice, with a complete disregard for the rule of law. The link to the original Arabic document has been included in the footnote below and a provisional English translation can be found at Appendix 2. Further, the same court has also ordered that all Bahá’í institutions be disbanded.

Approximately three months later, on 23 March, Mr. ‘Abdu’l-Malek al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthis, delivered a televised speech where he vehemently vilified and strongly denounced the Bahá’í Faith. He warned Yemenis of the “satanic” Bahá’í “movement” that is “waging a war of doctrine” against Islam, described Bahá’ís as “infidels” and deniers of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad, and spread other falsehoods about the Bahá’í Faith. He finally urged Yemenis to defend their country against the Bahá’ís under the pretext that “those who destroy the faith of people are no less evil and dangerous than those who kill people with their bombs.”

Within days, over 20 news sites reported on his speech alerting large numbers of Mr. al-Houthi’s armed followers about the Bahá’ís. Prominent Houthi public voices also added to these sentiments. For example, a writer commented on social media that “we will butcher every Bahá’í.” Similar comments were expressed by religious authorities in Sana’a, including the Mufti of Yemen, Shams al-Din Muhammad Sharaf al-Din. He spent a portion of his weekly Friday talk, aired live on television and radio on 30 March, cautioning Yemenis of the influence of the Bahá’ís. Furthermore, the Ministry of Information held the first in a series of workshops to train Yemenis active on social and traditional media on how to respond to the “war of doctrine” waged by the Bahá’ís. Other similar efforts were also organized by the Ministry of Information and government universities in Sana’a, Hudaidah, Dhamar, Imran, and Hujjah. Finally, a Yemeni television program named “Frankly” dedicated an episode to attacking human rights organizations and the Bahá’í Faith, and specifically referred to individual Bahá’ís by name and displayed their photographs.

On 28 September 2018 members of the Human Rights Council passed a resolution expressing concern for the Bahá’ís (A/73/53/Add.1), with the authorities in Yemen continuing to deny due process to the indicted individuals. Shortly after the adoption of this resolution, and in what could be seen as a brazen attempt to undermine it, Justice Abdu Ismail Hassan Rajeh—who also presided over the case of Mr. Hamed Bin Haydara and sentenced him to death—ordered the

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3 A copy of the original Arabic document can be found at: <https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/pdf/prosecution_response_to_appeal_-_original_arabic.pdf>

4 The speech, in its entirety, can be viewed at the following link: <https://almasirah.net/gallery/preview.php?file_id=13944>.


7 <Egypt News 24, "اليمن الآن: ورشة عمل حول الإعلام المجتمعي في مواجهة الحرب الناعمة بصنعاء".>

8 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVTjNmyG9-w&t=1247s>. 
prosecution to publish the names of the indicted Bahá’ís in a newspaper, further endangering their lives and that of their families. On 24 November 2018, submissions by the defence counsel to the Criminal Appeals Court to have Justice Rajeh recuse himself, owing to his patent bias against the Bahá’ís, were unsuccessful.

The persecution of the Yemeni Bahá’í community has been confirmed independently by the UN Group of Regional and International Eminent Experts on Yemen. Regarding the Bahá’ís, in its report dated 17 August 2018, The Group of Experts stated that:

There are also reasonable grounds to believe that the right to freedom of religion or belief has been violated in Yemen. The de facto authorities continued to persecute Baha’is on the basis of their belief, including by detaining and charging them with apostasy, openly deriding and demonizing the Bahá’í faith in legal filings, issuing death sentences and threatening their supporters.9

Iranian involvement

Multiple independent sources have, since 2016 and through their conversations with various officials in Yemen, repeatedly confirmed that Iranian authorities are directing efforts to persecute the Bahá’ís in Yemen, which has included pressure to deport those of Iranian descent to Iran.

Notwithstanding the fact that some fair-minded Houthi authorities have behaved in favour of the Bahá’ís, specific individuals, namely those referred to as Abu Taha, the then head of the National Security Office (or “Bureau” in UN reports) and Abu Emad, the Deputy-Head of the same Office as well as Mr. Rajeh Zayed from the Prosecutor’s Office, have displayed antithetical behaviour against the Bahá’ís and are reported to be receiving instructions from Iran to persecute the Bahá’í community. In addition to these individuals, the authorities in Iran and those presently ruling in Sana’a are held accountable for supporting and consenting to blatant acts of persecution against the Bahá’ís in Yemen.

Iranian involvement in the persecution of the Bahá’ís in Yemen is consistent with a general policy aimed at dealing with “The Bahá’í Question” as outlined in a once-secret 1991 government memorandum.10 That memorandum, endorsed by Iran’s Supreme Leader, outlines a wide range of economic, educational, and social measures aimed at “blocking the development” of the Iranian Bahá’ís. It also explicitly states the intention of Iranian authorities to “confront and destroy their [the Bahá’ís’] cultural roots outside the country [Iran]”. Indeed, the various forms of persecution experienced by Yemeni Bahá’ís bear a striking resemblance to what the Bahá’ís of Iran have experienced in their country, such as the spurious accusation, used when Bahá’ís are arrested, that they are somehow a threat to national security.

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9 A/HRC/42/17, para. 73.
These above findings were corroborated by the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Mr. Ahmed Shaheed. In a statement dated 22 May 2017, the Special Rapporteur highlighted the striking resemblance of recent persecution of the Bahá’ís in Yemen to that of the Bahá’ís in Iran, stating: “The recent escalation in the persistent pattern of persecution of the Bahá’í community in Sana’a mirrors the persecution suffered by the Bahá’ís living in Iran.” He also added that “[t]he harassment against the Bahá’ís, as religious minorities, seems to persist, if not worse amount to religious persecution in Yemen.”