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PRESS RELEASE

Baha'i International Community

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**Inflammatory speech by the Houthi leader targets Baha'is in Yemen
with genocidal intent**

SANA'A, Yemen – In a televised speech broadcasted to a wide audience within and outside of Yemen, the leader of the Houthis vehemently vilified and denounced the Baha'i Faith, further intensifying the ongoing persecution of the Baha'is in that country.

On 23 March 2018, Mr. Abdel-Malek al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthis in Yemen, gave a speech on the occasion of the first Friday of the Islamic month of Rajab, which commemorates the introduction of Islam to Yemen, to rally Yemenis against foreign powers and ideologies.

In the course of [his speech](#), Mr. al-Houthi employed a rhetoric reminiscent of statements made by the Supreme Leaders of Iran in former and [recent times](#) and strongly denounced the Baha'i Faith. Mr. al-Houthi warned Yemenis of the “satanic” Baha'i “movement” that is “waging a war of doctrine” against Islam. He described Baha'is as infidels and deniers of Islam and the Prophet and he spread other falsehoods about the Faith and its relationship to western countries and Israel. Finally, he urged Yemenis to defend their country from the Baha'is and members of other religious minorities under the pretext that, “those who destroy the faith in people are no less evil and dangerous than those who kill people with their bombs”.

Within days of his speech, over [twenty news sites](#) reiterated his negative comments about the Baha'i Faith, and a prominent Houthi writer and strategist [commented on social media](#) that “we will butcher every Baha'i”. Similar sentiments were expressed by religious authorities in Sana'a including the Mufti of Yemen, Shams al-Din Muhammad Sharaf al-Din, who received his education in Iran and was appointed by the Houthis last year. He spent a portion of his weekly Friday talk, aired live on television and radio on 30 March, cautioning Yemenis across the country of the influence of the Baha'is. 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 Baha'is. Other similar seminars, conferences and workshops were also organized by the Ministry of Information and government universities in Sana'a, Hudaidah, Dhamar, Imran, and Hujjah. Finally, a few days

ago a Yemeni TV program named “Frankly” dedicated an [episode](#) to attack human rights organizations and the Baha’i Faith, specifically referring to individual Baha’is by name and displaying their photographs.

“Not only is the content of Mr. al-Houthi’s speech deeply concerning, but also its context and some of its immediate consequences,” explained Ms. Bani Dugal, Principal Representative of the Baha’i International Community to the United Nations. “Mr. al-Houthi’s influence over a large number of armed followers as well as the echoing of his sentiments by the highest religious authority in Yemen, by other government officials, and by others on traditional and social media all imply that Mr. al-Houthi’s latest speech is a call for mass atrocity crimes against a religious minority which is genocidal in intent.”

Ms. Dugal further stated, “In order to avoid disastrous consequences for thousands of Yemeni Baha’is, the international community must condemn these latest actions by Mr. al-Houthi in the strongest terms, to demand an end to the spread of vitriolic, false rhetoric, and incitement to hatred against the Baha’is, and to call for the immediate release of all Baha’is imprisoned in Yemen.”

These latest developments constitute a severe escalation of the systematic pattern of activity undertaken by the authorities in Sana’a to oppress the Yemeni Baha’is—a pattern punctuated by [the mass arrest in August 2016](#) of over 60 women, men, and children participating in an educational gathering organized by Baha’is; the [call in April 2017](#) for the arrest of over two dozen prominent members of the Baha’i community and the subsequent detention of several Baha’is, including members of Baha’i institutions; and the [court pronouncement in January 2018](#) for the public execution of Mr. Hamed bin Haydara, a Baha’i detained since 2013 for his religious beliefs, and the dissolution of all Baha’i Assemblies in Yemen. Despite mounting pressure, at present, six Baha’is remain in prison, Mr. Haydara’s death sentence remains to be repealed, and some prominent Yemeni lawyers have refused to accept his appeal case in the fear of possible repercussions. Reports further indicate that the Houthis are monitoring and seeking to identify the Baha’is.

Several independent sources have repeatedly confirmed that Iranian authorities are directing efforts to persecute the Baha’is in Yemen. Multiple reports further indicate that high-ranking officials in the National Security Bureau are maintaining pressure on the Baha’i community as a result of instructions from Iran despite repeated appeals by prominent Yemenis, including some among the Houthis, for the release of the imprisoned Baha’is.

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