

Death of US embassy employee in Houthi detention sparks outrage

Thu, 2022-05-26 19:39

AL-MUKALLA: The Iran-backed Houthis have again been criticized for mistreating prisoners after an employee at a US aid organization in Yemen died while being held by the group.

The US embassy in Sanaa said on Thursday that Abdulhameed Al-Ajami, one of its staff members in the Yemeni capital who was abducted by the Houthis late last year, had died in Houthi detention.

In a statement, also calling for the release of the other workers detained by the Houthis, the embassy said: "We grieve for retired USAID (US Agency for International Development) employee Abdulhameed Al-Ajami, who died in Houthi captivity.

"He was an innocent grandfather who should never have died away from his family, a proud Yemeni dedicated to educating Yemeni children.

"We extend our condolences to his loved ones and call on the Houthis to end this injustice and release every single current and former US Embassy employee now."

Al-Ajami was among at least a dozen Yemeni workers at the embassy and USAID who were abducted and later forcibly disappeared after the militia group raided the embassy's compound.

Yemeni activists and local media reports said that Al-Ajami was brutally tortured by the Houthis and was denied life-saving medication, a move that led to his death.

Al-Ajami's death came as friends of another US embassy abductee, Bassam Al-Mardahi, warned that he could die too, as he was in a critical condition due to torture by his captors.

Yemeni government officials, human rights activists, and former abductees strongly condemned the Houthis for abusing prisoners, stating that the death of Al-Ajami was another clue to the torture methods used by the group against thousands of prisoners.

Yemen's Minister of Information Muammar Al-Eryani offered his condolences to Al-Ajami's family and called for international action to force the Houthis to stop abusing prisoners and release them immediately.

He expressed his strong condemnation of the group's "psychological and physical torture" of Al-Ajami, treatment, the minister said, that had resulted in his death eight months after being abducted, adding that he had been deprived "of his most basic rights, including medicines."

The French Embassy in Yemen also denounced the death and asked the Houthis to release the remaining abducted US and UN workers.

In a tweet, the embassy said: "It reiterated its demand for the release of all local employees of the US embassy and the UN who have been arbitrarily detained by the Houthis for several months."

The Houthis are also still holding two Yemenis working for the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Sanaa who were abducted in the city in November. The two workers have not been put on trial and the Houthis have prevented them from contacting their families, the UN said.

Similarly, Yemeni human rights activists said that torture was rife inside Houthi prisons and dozens of civilians abducted by the group had died while in detention.

Fuad Al-Mansouri, a Yemeni human rights activist, told Arab News that many detainees inside Houthi prisons may face the same fate as Al-Ajami if the Houthis were not forced to stop abusing prisoners.

"Al-Ajami's death is a very serious indication of the mistreatment of detainees in the prisons of the Houthi militia. This is not the first incident, and it will not be the last," Al-Mansouri said.

Amat Al-Salam Al-Hajj, chairwoman of the Abductees' Mothers Association, an umbrella organization for thousands of female relatives of war prisoners, told Arab News that the Houthis had barred relatives of the detained US embassy employees from speaking to the organization or media, urging the UN Yemen envoy to work on releasing thousands of detainees.

"In Houthi prisons, the dignity of the Yemeni human being is insulted. The file of the abductee is a true humanitarian crisis that must be addressed," she said.

Abdullah Al-Munifi, a Yemeni journalist and former detainee who was released from a Houthi prison in 2018, told Arab News that he was whipped with electrical cables, hung by his arms, deprived of sleep and toilet facilities, electrocuted, and kept in solitary confinement for months.

"I wish I would die due to torture. Sometimes they make wounds on the body and put salt on them," Al-Munifi said.



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Houthis abduct two more Yemeni employees of US embassy in Sanaa
Saudi Arabia condemns seizure of closed US Embassy in Sanaa by Yemen's Houthis

[Europe 'silent' on 'deplorable conditions' for migrants in Libya: NGO chief](#)

Thu, 2022-05-26 18:31

LONDON: Europe has failed to note and act on the plight of thousands of migrants in Libya who are being held in "deplorable conditions" and often under arbitrary detention, an international NGO chief has said.

Federico Soda, chief of mission for the International Organization for

Migration's presence in Libya, said too little is being done to have an effect on the country's "environment of arbitrary detention and deplorable conditions" for migrants.

"Most member states are silent on these issues in Libya," Soda told reporters in Brussels. "On a number of issues in the country, we (the IOM) are the only voice. That's problematic. What concerns me is kind of the acquiescence."

He described the attitude prevalent in Europe as: "'It's not a problem on our shore, so let's just keep it there'."

Soda said the international community should dish out "more condemnation" and demand "more calls for law and order for investigations" into the situation in Libya.

A recent IOM report found that a record 32,425 people were returned to Libya after trying to travel to Europe last year.

The majority were intercepted or rescued from the often unsafe small boats they travel in across the Mediterranean Sea.

Soda said the issue is society-wide, with multiple groups guilty of allowing the crisis to continue.

"It's not about elected people; I think the whole of the community has a responsibility here, because when societies become as polarized as we've been on migration issues, I think we all have to look in the mirror and maybe put ourselves in the shoes and the conditions of where these people are coming from," he added.



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UN experts seek to verify mass graves for migrants in LibyaUN 'extremely worried' about plight of migrants in Libyan detention centers

[US calls for more crossing points for delivery of aid to Syria](#)

Author:

Thu, 2022-05-26 00:04

NEW YORK: The denial of access for humanitarian efforts during armed conflicts is reinforcing a vicious cycle of killings and forced displacements, the US warned on Wednesday.

The result of this can be seen in Syria where, after 11 years of the "Assad

regime's brutal war," 14 million people rely on humanitarian aid to survive and 6.6 million are displaced within their own country, said Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the permanent US representative to the UN.

She called for the renewal and expansion of existing crossing points and addition of new crossings to make it easier to deliver aid to the Syrian people.

"Every month, Syrian civilians are attacked and killed by the Assad regime and others," she said. "And hospitals often don't have the medicine or supplies to help the injured because humanitarian convoys aren't able to reach them."

She was speaking as she convened a meeting of the Security Council, the presidency of which is held by the US this month. It came in the wake of the publication of a report by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on the protection of civilians during armed conflicts, which paints a bleak picture of the difficulties humanitarian operations face in conflict zones such as Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan and Mali.

It highlights grave concerns about attacks on humanitarian workers and assets; 143 such security incidents were recorded in 14 countries and territories during 2021, which resulted in the deaths of 93 aid workers.

In a concept note distributed before the meeting, the US mission stated that although international humanitarian law and other legal frameworks provide the necessary foundation to facilitate humanitarian access and the protection of aid workers, the legal principles are often ignored.

Focusing on Syria in particular, Thomas-Greenfield told her fellow ambassadors that the Security Council has the power to provide paths for humanitarian access where it is most desperately needed.

"We did this last year when we unanimously voted to renew the mandate for UN cross-border assistance in Syria," she said.

"That was an important, lifesaving decision for millions of people. It demonstrated the best of what we can do when we work together."

The UN estimates that 14.6 million Syrians will need humanitarian assistance this year, an increase of almost 10 percent on last year.

"So we have to renew the mandate again," Thomas-Greenfield said. "And we have to expand it and increase the number of crossing points to meet the rising demands for humanitarian aid in Syria."

She will visit Bab Al-Hawa, the only crossing point that currently remains open, in the coming days.

Security Council discussions about the issue often prove difficult, with Russia and China consistently insisting that all humanitarian aid deliveries require the consent of the Syrian authorities.

When deliveries of international aid to Syria began in 2014, the Security Council approved four border crossings. In January 2020, permanent member Russia used its power of veto to force the closure of all but one. Moscow argues that international aid operations violate the Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Vassily Nebenzia, Russia's permanent representative to the UN, said: "Despite notable successes in the fight against international terrorism, the establishment of complete peace and stability in the country is hindered by the illegal occupation by the United States of a significant part of the (Syrian) territory.

"Camps with inhuman living conditions for the civilian population continue to operate in the occupied territories. Devastation and total lawlessness reign."

He accused the "occupying US power" of "openly plundering" Syria's natural and agricultural resources, and of illegally smuggling oil and grain out of the country, describing it as "the American recipe for dealing with the global energy and food crisis."

"Despite the protracted serious humanitarian situation in Syria and the economic crisis, the US and the EU continue to apply illegal, unilateral sanctions against the long-suffering people of Syria, with disastrous consequences," Nebenzia added.

The current mandate for the cross-border mechanism is due to expire in July.



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[Egypt wants to shift focus to developing countries in climate talks -official](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Wed, 2022-05-25 23:41

CAIRO: Egypt will position itself as an impartial arbiter while hosting this year's COP27 UN climate summit, as it pushes other nations to act on climate pledges while promoting the interests of the developing world, a senior Egyptian official said.

Egypt, where unauthorized public demonstrations are banned, would also welcome protests within the rules of the Nov. 7-18 summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, said Wael Aboulmagd, special representative to the COP27 president.

A natural gas exporter, Egypt takes over presidency of the UN climate talks from Britain. Last year's summit in Glasgow, Scotland, ended with the nearly 200 countries in attendance promising to strengthen their climate pledges this year.

Wealthy nations also disappointed many in Glasgow by saying they would not deliver the \$100 billion per year promised from 2020 until 2023 to help developing countries with their energy transition and with adapting to a warming world.

Delivering this financing is among Egypt's priorities for COP27. It also wants to focus on securing separate "loss and damage" funds, or compensation payments to climate-vulnerable countries already suffering from climate-related weather extremes, Aboulmagd said in an interview.

"There are issues that are of interest and priority to developing countries, and there are high expectations from us as a developing country to ensure that these issues are taken on board and that they achieve commensurate progress with how important they are," he said.

But Egypt also would seek to mediate between developed and developing countries that have clashed over issues including carbon emissions and climate financing, as it tries to help steer a move from pledges to action, Aboulmagd said.

"In this particular year it is in the interest of the process that a perception of impartiality and equal distance from everyone is maintained."

Aboulmagd said Egypt was working to launch about 17 voluntary initiatives in areas including food and agriculture and water management, hoping to inspire ideas and action to help countries meet their pledges.

Egypt is fine tuning its own updated target for cutting greenhouse gas emissions, known as a nationally determined contribution (NDC).

"We intend to move even faster, despite very difficult circumstances,"

Aboulmagd said, referring to economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

To promote global access and representation at COP27, Egypt has sought to fast track accreditation for under-represented civil society organizations from Africa, Aboulmagd said, adding that he hoped climate campaigners and activists play a constructive role.

"There are certain rules and we're working with the secretariat to ensure that if there are people who want to protest, they're entitled to do that, and it's done in a peaceful manner," he said.

"It's good to have people yelling at you – hopefully not throwing stuff at you, but just yelling at you and we're accustomed to that."

Egypt's government had worked with hotels to provide affordable accommodation for participants in Sharm el-Sheikh, a tourist resort on the Red Sea, he said.

"What we have done to the utmost is to ensure that decent hotels and very reasonable rates are made available."



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[Iraqi boy eludes security to board Iran-bound plane](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Wed, 2022-05-25 23:26

NAJAF: Iraqi aviation authorities have been left red-faced after a 10-year-old boy on his own boarded an Iran-bound plane from a busy airport in a Shiite shrine city after several security checks.

The international airport in Najaf, south of Baghdad, said Wednesday it would review security after the boy passed under the radar of seven checks, mixing in with large crowds of travelers.

The child was only intercepted after boarding an Iran Air-chartered aircraft, airport manager Hikmat Ahmed told AFP.

About five hours after his arrival at the airport on Monday night, "the plane crew contacted us about him," he said.

"Anyone who failed in their duties will be sanctioned, fired or transferred" after an investigation, the official said.

According to a security source, his parents who live in a district near the airport had informed police of his disappearance.

Iraq's civil aviation authority said a private firm had since 2019 been in charge of security at Najaf airport, which receives hundreds of thousands of pilgrims a year.

"All legal procedures" would be taken against the company once the investigation has been completed, it said.



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