

# Between the Lines: Understanding the Houthi Employment Code of Conduct

by [Laila Lutf Al-Thawr \(/experts/laila-lutf-al-thawr\)](#)

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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Laila Lutf Al-Thawr \(/experts/laila-lutf-al-thawr\)](#)

Laila Lutf Al-Thawr is the Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the Political Bureau and Relations for the Arab Hope Party. She is also Head of the Sam Initiative for Peace and Human Rights. She is a political and human-rights activist in the field of peacebuilding.



Since the failure of international efforts to renew the ceasefire in Yemen this past November, the Houthi movement has—with increasing speed—spread its influence and dominance over the men and women living under its control.

There has been concern about a process of institutionalized indoctrination of [children \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBEGb100szA\)](#) and youth through coordinated changes to school curricula in educational institutions. Of late, indoctrination in public-sector employment has also come to light. The vast majority of Yemen’s public-sector employees are under Houthi control, accounting for around one million public- sector employees out of 1.2 million nationwide. This indoctrination is most thoroughly evidenced by the public-sector [Code of Conduct \(https://www.saba.ye/storage/files/blog/1667842489\\_pTyQTA.pdf\)](#) that has been forcibly imposed on all state agencies since November.

Ever since the [Houthi movement took power \(https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast-40645075\)](#) in 2014, it has worked to gradually spread its influence to state agencies and all public-sector positions and sought to get rid of public-sector employees who are not associated with the movement—particularly those in decision-making roles. The movement has established numerous bodies with which it maintains direct ties, and these bodies have taken power from revenue-bearing ministries and other entities, rendering them fully subject to the movement. These include zakat (through the Houthis’ establishment of the General Authority for Zakat) and international cooperation (through the replacement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a new administration called “SCMCHA ([https://www.scmcha.org/ar/](#))”). It is SMCHA that, in accordance with the movement’s laws, administers donors and international relief organizations and their projects carried out in Houthi-controlled areas. SMCHA also selects the Yemeni organizations (mostly associated with the Houthis) that partner with international organizations.

The Houthis have also imposed mandatory cultural courses on public-sector employees in order to propagate their perspective, with sections dedicated to the movement’s chief, Hussein al-Houthi. This is intended to attract and indoctrinate employees. Those who refuse are punished and face accusations of treason, leading many to be fired and replaced by unqualified and incompetent followers.

Meanwhile, high-level employees and officials in public-sector and Houthi-associated entities, as well as their associates, are receiving generous monthly salaries under the rubric of “incentives” and “gratuities,” as evidenced by their rising standards of living. In contrast, government employees who are not associated with the Houthis have not received their salaries for more than seven years. Various excuses have been put forward: the relocation of the Central Bank to Aden, along the withholding of funds from oil and gas revenues from Marib, some areas of which remains outside of Houthi control. Even so, billions in revenue are coming in from organizations in the hands of the movement, and these funds could be used to fund the salaries of all government employees throughout the country. For example, under the 2019 [Stockholm Agreement \(https://osesgy.unmissions.org/ar/%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2586%25D8%25B5-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2583%25D8%25A7%25D9%2585%25D9%2584-%25D9%2584%25D8%25A7%25D8%25AA%25D9%2581%25D8%25A7%25D9%2582-%25D8%25A7%25D8%25B3%25D8%25AA%25D9%2588%25D9%2583%25D9%2587%25D9%2588%25D9%2584%25D9%2585\)](#), revenues from the port of Al Hudaydah should have been earmarked to cover the salaries of government employees.

Now, public servants are subject to the Code, which is considered mandatory and part of employees’ performance standards. All who refuse to sign are under threat of being fired and replaced. The Code is based on the beliefs and statements of movement leadership and Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, as well as on the movement’s lectures and lessons about the Holy Quran, rather than being based on the Quran itself. The hadith of the Prophet are completely excluded, and the Code is chiefly based on [Malik al-Ashtar’s \(https://www.marefa.org/%25D9%2585%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2583\\_%25D8%25A8%25D9%2586\\_%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25AD%25D8%25A7%25D8%25B-%25D8%25A7%25D8%25B3%25D8%25AA%25D9%2588%25D9%2583%25D9%2587%25D9%2588%25D9%2584%25D9%2585\)](#) statements about Imam Ali. Yemen’s constitution and laws are considered only secondary reference materials.

In reading the Code of Conduct, one finds that it strives to fully impose the perspective and authority of the Houthis on public-sector employment. This is by imposing loyalty to the movement’s leader (Abdul-Malik al-Houthi) instead of to the nation or to human rights principles. Signing and acknowledging the Code is being imposed as a requirement to remain in public-sector employment. This denies the existence of any diversity in perspective, political affiliation, religion, or sect. Any violation of the code is considered treason for which the employee must be punished. As one finds in the concluding clauses, it is even considered a violation for an employee to comment on, amend, or criticize the Code.

The Houthi movement adopted the Code before it was affirmed by the House of Representatives in Sana’a, and was then illegally applied to the House itself so that the movement could silence dissenting voices and monopolize power. The goal was to affirm the Code and legitimate its application across the board—quickly changing conditions to the movement’s benefit and subverting the normal order of legislation. Such a move hints at the Houthis’ expectation that an agreement will soon give them the right to spread their influence in areas currently under their control, a dangerous inclination that would violate Security Council Resolution 2216. It would oppress millions of inhabitants who have already been subject to slavery and human-rights abuses since the temporary rule of warring parties was imposed with international support.

Within the Code’s language, a careful reader can find: continually distorted religious concepts; constitutional law used in twisted ways; and vague terms that hold particular underlying meanings for the Houthis. The contradictory texts of the Code are like honey adulterated with poison. The opening states that adherence to the Code must be based on conviction, yet numerous clauses oblige employees to sign in order to remain employed, identify objecting to the Code as treason, and penalize anyone who violates the Code, as reaffirmed in the guarantees clause.

As an example, employees are to celebrate religious occasions regardless of their personal perspective under the provision, “Carry revolutionary spirit and participate in enlivening national and religious celebrations.” Most such events are particular to the Houthi movement rather than Yemeni society writ large. Employees are also to “adopt unambiguous positions regarding enemies of the country and nation and actively participate in public mobilization activities.” This means mandatory conscription at any time the movement wishes to build a mass army with millions of combatants, much like the [Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq \(https://www.aljazeera.net/politics/2022/6/14/%25D9%2581%25D9%258A-%25D8%25B0%25D9%2583%25D8%25B1%25D9%2589-%25D8%25AA%25D8%25A3%25D8%25B3%25D9%258A%25D8%25B3%25D9%2587-](#)

[%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25AD%25D8%25B4%25D8%25AF-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B4%25D8%25B9%25D8%25A8%25D9%258A-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25B9%25D8%25B1%25D8%25A7%25D9%2582%25D9%258A-%25D9%2585%25D9%2586\).](#) Resistance to this is considered an ambiguity in position and, therefore, treason. The Code also considers revealing or leaking documents about corruption to be an employment infraction to be punished appropriately, legitimizing and protecting corruption. It likewise prohibits combatting or shedding light on instances of corruption—which, of late, has been worsening across all sectors and government agencies in the absence of the state and its oversight mechanisms.

The Code addresses employees collectively without referencing or taking into account gender or women’s rights. It simply stipulates a requirement for “modesty and virtue”—a term certainly directed at women. There is also a vague sentence stipulating, “adherence to legal regulations between male and female employees in the workplace.”

Employees refer to all this as a [contract of slavery \(https://alsahwa-yemen.net/p-61782\)](https://alsahwa-yemen.net/p-61782) that dedicates the resources of the state and its agencies to the service of the movement and its associates. Despite popular opposition to the Code, the Houthis have continued to forcibly impose it. Employees must choose the lesser of two evils: surrender and sign or be fired and rendered a traitor. Public-sector employees have already endured more than seven years of fear for their positions in the hope that a political normalization would return their stolen rights and salaries.

The Houthis have taken advantage of this to gain workers who, like slaves, toil without rights or pay. The Code requires full-time presence, thereby cutting public-sector employees off from opportunities for salaried side-work that could help them survive. This shows the movement’s insistence on using employees effectively as slaves and eliminating opportunities for them to live with dignity and provide the barest means of sustenance for themselves and their families. This could also be a way to push public-sector employees not to sign the Code, leading to their firing and replacement with adherents of the movement.

Observers of the Houthis see the Code as another tool to eliminate opponents within state agencies. The Code prohibits appointments based on loyalty or kinship ties, but the opposite is unfolding on the ground, as the movement repeatedly hands over open posts to its followers. Most roles and appointments are being reserved for particular “Hashemite” families who claim descent from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the right to govern, while the rest of the Yemeni people is being excluded.

This favoritism is part of the Houthi movement claims to speak in the name of “Hashemites” in Yemen as an ethnic, sectarian, and religious minority. When the movement first appeared, this was a way to gain power, ease military recruitment, and gain a limited degree of international support via sympathy for minorities. In reality, the Houthi movement does not represent the “Hashemites,” many of whom are movement opponents and face [persecution and threats \(https://middle-east-online.com/%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%258A%25D9%2585%25D9%2586-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2587%25D8%25A7%25D8%25B4%25D9%2585%25D9%258A%25D9%2588%25D9%2586-%25D9%2588%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2585%25D8%25BA%25D8%25A7%25D9%2585%25D8%25B1%25D8%25A7%25D8%25AA-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25AD%25D9%2588%25D8%25AB%25D9%258A%25D8%25A9\)](https://middle-east-online.com/%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%258A%25D9%2585%25D9%2586-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2587%25D8%25A7%25D8%25B4%25D9%2585%25D9%258A%25D9%2588%25D9%2586-%25D9%2588%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D9%2585%25D8%25BA%25D8%25A7%25D9%2585%25D8%25B1%25D8%25A7%25D8%25AA-%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25AD%25D9%2588%25D8%25AB%25D9%258A%25D8%25A9) like other Yemenis. This indicates that the standards for belonging to the movement are based more on ideology and social group than on “Hashemite” ethnicity.

There is substantial [public opposition \(https://d.docs.live.net/00a0fad18193a499/Documents/CAAPeace%2520Track/2022/EDITED\\_TransitionalJusticeYemen\\_FINAL\\_NS.docx\)](https://d.docs.live.net/00a0fad18193a499/Documents/CAAPeace%2520Track/2022/EDITED_TransitionalJusticeYemen_FINAL_NS.docx) on the Yemeni street to this Code. Resistance is bubbling up from the grumbings of men and women about the Houthis’ continued monopolization of power and decision-making, the movement’s imposition of its perspective to the exclusion of all others, and its repeated violations of employee rights, particularly in state agencies. This has emerged through such instances as the Showra Council issuing a [statement \(https://url.emailprotection.link/?bpDXgQBIE-STh-qaaoIGSpzf8Wp6w-v3lpn6cmv6bCuJlBwAmZ7svYH7Y2E09IB7OjECvALLQ1t9G4bSPQfof1yE1-lv4Hnq5fV3JdF8jAo2pGPJa2NIBDOoSOXNwChpS\)](https://url.emailprotection.link/?bpDXgQBIE-STh-qaaoIGSpzf8Wp6w-v3lpn6cmv6bCuJlBwAmZ7svYH7Y2E09IB7OjECvALLQ1t9G4bSPQfof1yE1-lv4Hnq5fV3JdF8jAo2pGPJa2NIBDOoSOXNwChpS) rejecting the policy, and a dedicated [episode \(https://url.emailprotection.link/?bjgQV6ngaz8MCBsfarvFLynGxtpwPmqSrLEhaP\\_z-IL5yt7uqWKPPqaFbtujd2GA-Y-o8D6POYHoThzJO80zPSCvK4\\_e0aFJdaiAEbIYIFm4wot54gVG73vJTWGg6FT1B\)](https://url.emailprotection.link/?bjgQV6ngaz8MCBsfarvFLynGxtpwPmqSrLEhaP_z-IL5yt7uqWKPPqaFbtujd2GA-Y-o8D6POYHoThzJO80zPSCvK4_e0aFJdaiAEbIYIFm4wot54gVG73vJTWGg6FT1B) on the Alghad Almushriq TV channel on this policy where guest speakers likewise rejected it. Although the Code contains clauses related to employment matters, it has clear political and ideological dimensions, with politicized religion deployed to achieve its goals. However, those who have resisted these efforts face [threats \(https://www.independentarabia.com/node/391801/%25D8%25B3%25D9%258A%25D8%25A7%25D8%25B3%25D8%25A9/%25D8%25AA%25D9%2582%25D8%25A7%25D8%25B1%25D9%258A%25D8%25B3%25D8%25AA%25D8%25A8%25D8%25AF%25D9%2584-%25D8%25A8%25D8%25A7%25D9%2584%25D8%25AF%25D8%25B3%25D8%25AA%25D9%2588%25D8%25B1-%25D9%2585%25D8%25AF%25D9%2588%25D9%2586%25D8%25A9-%25D8%25B3%25D9%2584%25D9%2588%25D9%2583\)](#), forcing them to flee to other areas inside Yemen or outside the country.

It has become critical to seek rational solutions to bring peace to Yemen outside the logic of partition and support for armed factions. This is the principal cause of the continued rebellion of armed actors. The international affirmation and subvention of each group’s dominance over its area of control must stop. The peace that Yemen demands must encompass the building of a state that protects law and order and equal citizenship throughout the country. This would ensure the success and integrity of Yemen, its people, and its neighbors.

For peace to be achieved, the economy and public-sector employment must be made neutral. The Stockholm Agreement must be adhered to in regards the disbursement of salaries to public-sector employees. To date, the Houthi movement has failed to adhere to this requirement. Instead, the movement has used the salaries of public-sector employees as a bargaining chip in negotiations and to gain the support of the Yemeni public that it claims to defend.

This is possible because, for reasons that are unclear, there are no controls built into the Agreement to guarantee its implementation, thereby causing the Agreement to fail. Parties must be required to use available resources to pay salaries to all public-sector employees in regions under their control, without exception and throughout the duration of the conflict. The salary issue should be used to push parties to return to the negotiating table and not away from it. This mechanism would be a strong influence to improve humanitarian conditions, reduce the conflict, and bring about a durable peace.

Side talks between any individual actor and the international community must also be stopped. These obstruct comprehensive negotiations and lead to hubris among negotiating parties rather than putting pressure on them to move towards peace. Instead, those affected by the cutoff of salaries—the men, women, unions, and large labor federations that are the main stakeholders here—should be mobilized to play a role. In particular, the representation of women should be safeguarded. Female party-members, activist networks, and feminist groups associated with the state should be guaranteed participation at a rate of at least 30 percent.

Peace will not come about through begging. It will not come about through partial or patchwork solutions. Peace will come about through liberation from the contracts and bonds of slavery that have been imposed upon the people and by improving the economy and daily life for men and women in all parts of the nation. ❖

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