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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Platform for Tracking Organized Crime and Money Laundering in Yemen (P.T.O.C) published its new report explaining how the Iran-backed Houthis exploit African migrants in Yemen through forced recruitment, military exploitation, and systematic violations of their human rights. These practices pose a humanitarian and security threat that extends to the entire region, necessitating an urgent international response to address it.

The Iran-backed Houthis seek to enhance their military and logistical capabilities through the recruitment of migrants, compensating for human losses in their battles. They also bolster their regional presence by threatening waterways such as the Red Sea and disrupting international trade.



INTRODUCTION

Yemen represents a major transit point for migrants coming from the Horn of Africa, but the deteriorating security and humanitarian conditions have made them easy targets for exploitation.

The report explains how Houthis use migrants as fuel for their war through forced recruitment and military exploitation, as well as their involvement in arms and human trafficking. The report also sheds light on the crimes committed by the Houthis inside the Martyrs' Mosque and detention centers, which represent serious violations of international laws.

The (P.T.O.C) platform previously published about the Houthis' activity in the Horn of Africa and the path of expansion. However, The new report reveals security and intelligence documents and information being published for the first time about the transformation of the Houthis, of a number of specific sites into training camps, recruitment centers, and intelligence activities for Africans. The most prominent of these sites is the Martyrs' Mosque (located in Bab El-Yemen) in Sanaa, where African refugees in Yemen from Somali, Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Djiboutian nationalities are recruited and subjected to intensive sectarian courses, military training, and then sent to the frontlines or the Horn of Africa region in exchange for monthly salaries. This is to spread the Houthi sectarian ideology and exploit them in smuggling weapons and fighters into Yemen across the Red Sea.

The Houthis have set up four other military training centers for Africans: Bajil in Hodeidah, (Youssef Al-Madani in charge); al-Jawf (Badr Bazara'a in charge), Sanaa (Mutlaq A-Marani in charge), and Saada (Hasan Dubish in charge).



INTRODUCTION

The Houthis and their backers, Iran, have been seeking domination and control over the Horn of Africa region, particularly since their coup against the legitimate government and takeover of the capital Sanaa and several provinces in September 2014, followed by a bloody war ignited in March 2015. This is done through establishing a foothold in the Red Sea entrance, setting up military bases in the region, and promoting sectarian Shia ideology.

Documents obtained by the Platform indicate that some African groups who have been gathering at the Martyrs' Mosque recently rebelled and refused to follow the orders of the Houthis, protesting against ongoing violations and mistreatment they have faced. This dramatic development in the relationship between the militia and the Africans led to the militia carrying out a massacre inside the Martyrs' Mosque, where one Eritrean national, who was the leader of the group, was killed and others were injured.

According to information and witnesses, Houthis targeted the group's leader, Mohammed Ali Mohammed Alousen, also known as Abu Muhandis (Eritrean nationality), who was recruiting individuals from the Afar region and sending them for ideological and military training affiliated with the Houthis in the city of Hodeidah. He was also involved in smuggling weapons from the Horn of Africa to the Yemeni coasts under the control of the Houthis. Additionally, some members of the African group were wounded during the incident.

This incident shows the extent of slavery and persecution suffered by Africans in militia-controlled areas, and how the Houthis treat them as tools and fuel for their war, so they can be disposed of cold-bloodedly at any time and without reason, in a brutal and atrocious manner condemned by all divine and secular laws, falling under the category of war crimes.

INTRODUCTION

Reports from the previous Platform indicate that dozens of African migrants died and over 200 others were injured in a fire on March 7, 2021 after Houthi security forces fired shells at an immigration detention center in Sanaa, to disperse them after they protested against the degrading and illegal treatment and inhumane detention conditions.

Thus, This report is a continuation of a series of reports released by the Platform earlier, revealing the dangerous Houthi activity in the African Horn, and disclosing secret information for the first time about the smuggling of weapons by the Iran-backed militia from the Horn of Africa to Yemen and vice versa, as well as human trafficking.

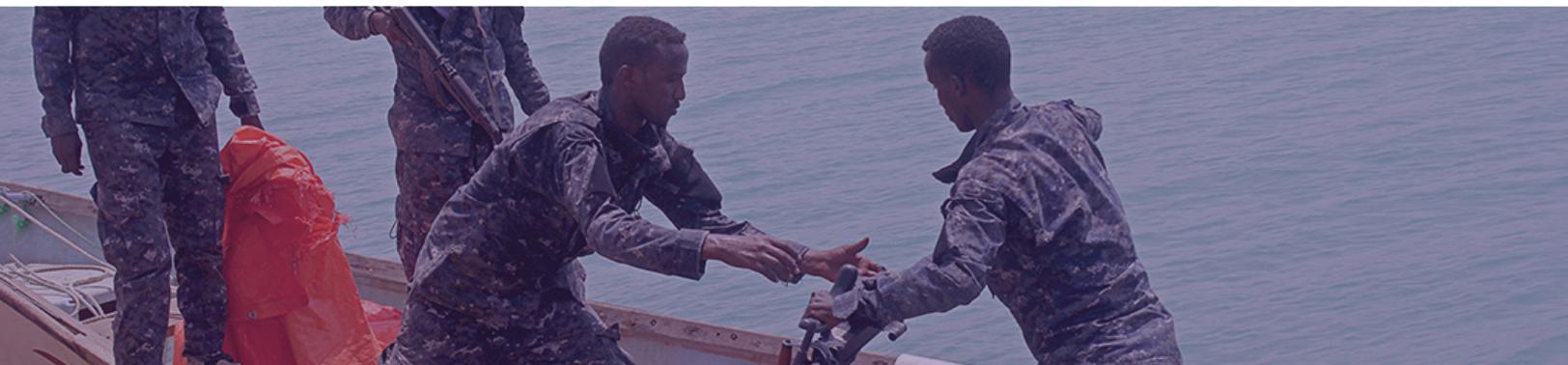
The Houthis heavily relies on smuggling weapons across the Red Sea, through African smugglers and mafias under the supervision of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, where it is transported to countries bordering the Red Sea (Somalia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Sudan) before being collected and delivered to the Houthis through the port of Hodeidah.⁽¹⁾



INTRODUCTION

Here is a list of African elements involved in arms and human trafficking to and from Yemen:

| S | Names |
|----|--|
| 1 | Taju Sharif |
| 2 | Ramadan Ahmed Yousef |
| 3 | Younis Abdu Deri Sheikh Younis |
| 4 | Abu Yousef/ Ethiopian |
| 5 | Muftah Qadir Ahmed Ali |
| 6 | Yousef Mohamed Maqan Hussein |
| 7 | Mahmoud Abdullah Ghili |
| 8 | Nour El Din Abdel Samad Bakr |
| 9 | Abdullah Kamal Mohamed Idris |
| 10 | Ibrahim Abdel Qadir Mohamed Mo'alim |
| 11 | Idris Ibrahim Ahmed |
| 12 | Mohamed Nour Abdi Idhn |
| 13 | Mohamed Saeed Ali Saeed |
| 14 | Khaled Siraj Al-Hajj Mahmoud Kiro (AKA, Abu Suleiman/ Ethiopian) |
| 15 | Mohamed Saleh Ibrahim Saeed ⁽²⁾ |



HUMANITARIAN CONDITIONS AND STRATEGIC DIMENSIONS OF MIGRATION TO YEMEN

Migrant Flows and Its Causes

Despite the destructive war in Yemen, African migrants continue to cross the maritime borders to reach Yemeni territories. Data indicates that the number of African migrants is increasing exponentially.

In October 2024, 6450 African migrants arrived in Yemen, representing a 136% increase compared to September of the same year.

The total number of African migrants between 2023 and 2024 was approximately 97,210, compared to 73,233 in 2022 and 27,693 in 2021.

The United Nations estimates the total number of African migrants in Yemen to be between 200,000 and 308,000, with 88% of them from Ethiopia and 12% from Somalia.

Motivations for Migration:

Escape The Hardship:

- In Ethiopia, drought between 2021 and 2023 led to the deaths of 6.8 million livestock, with 20 million people in need of urgent food assistance.
- In Somalia, 727,000 people are at risk of famine due to ongoing security and environmental crises.
- In Eritrea, extreme poverty and difficult living conditions are forcing people to seek refuge abroad.

Yemen as an Alternative Destination:

- Yemen represents a more realistic and less costly option compared to migration routes to Europe, where the cost of a sea journey from the Horn of Africa to Yemen is around \$170.

HUMANITARIAN CONDITIONS AND STRATEGIC DIMENSIONS OF MIGRATION TO YEMEN

Humanitarian Conditions of Migrants

Statistics:

- 48% of African migrants in Yemen are homeless, while 17% live in temporary shelters.
- 42% of them depend on seasonal jobs, while 35% lack any source of income.

Risks:

- During the period from January to August 2024, 337 drowning deaths were recorded along the sea routes leading to Yemen.
- In one incident in October 2024, smugglers forced 125 migrants to jump from boats into open water, leading to their drowning.



HOUTHI EXPLOITATION OF AFRICAN MIGRANTS

Forced Recruitment and Military Exploitation

Al- Aqsa Flood Program:

- Since late 2023, the Houthis have launched a military program to train African migrants. In November 2024, the first batch graduated from the program, with 220 African migrants registered.

Recruitment Mechanisms:

- Since the beginning of 2024, the Houthis have arrested more than 3,480 African migrants in Saada, and transferred them to Sanaa. There, they are forced to join military training camps or face forced deportation.

Military Objectives:

- UN reports show an increase in the number of Houthi fighters, from 30,000 in 2015 to 220,000 in 2022, reaching 350,000 by mid-2024.

Logistical and Propaganda Exploitation

Combat and Logistical Tasks:

- Migrants are forced to transport weapons, dig trenches, and build fortifications, in addition to performing dangerous work on the front lines.



HOUTHI EXPLOITATION OF AFRICAN MIGRANTS

Media Propaganda:

- Houthi media channels, such as Al-Masirah, use the funerals of African fighters in extensive recruitment campaigns. For example, the channel broadcast the funeral of Ethiopian fighter Qasim Ahmed Yousef, whom it described as a (hero who sacrificed himself for the sake of God), as well as Somali Mohammed Saleh Sheikh Taher, who was killed in the 2020 battles.

Human Rights Violations

Sexual and Physical Violence:

- Violations include: mutilation, enforced disappearance, torture, and rape.
- In a horrific incident in 2021, Houthi forces killed more than 60 Ethiopian migrants inside a detention center in Sanaa, by firing rockets at the building.

Mass Killing and Expulsion:

- In April 2020, thousands of Ethiopian migrants were forcibly expelled from northern Yemen, using mortars and rockets, killing dozens.



HOUTHI EXPLOITATION OF AFRICAN MIGRANTS

Strategic Dimensions of Exploiting Migrants

1. Military Dimensions

The Houthis seek to enhance their military and logistical capabilities by recruiting migrants, which compensates for human losses in their battles. They also strengthen their regional presence by threatening waterways, such as the Red Sea, and disrupting international trade.

2. Humanitarian Dimensions

The Houthi practices against migrants exacerbate the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, leading to their direct and illegal exploitation to achieve political and military goals.

3. Regional Dimensions

These practices pose a direct threat to the Gulf States, as the Houthis exploit migrants to exert political and logistical pressure on neighboring countries.

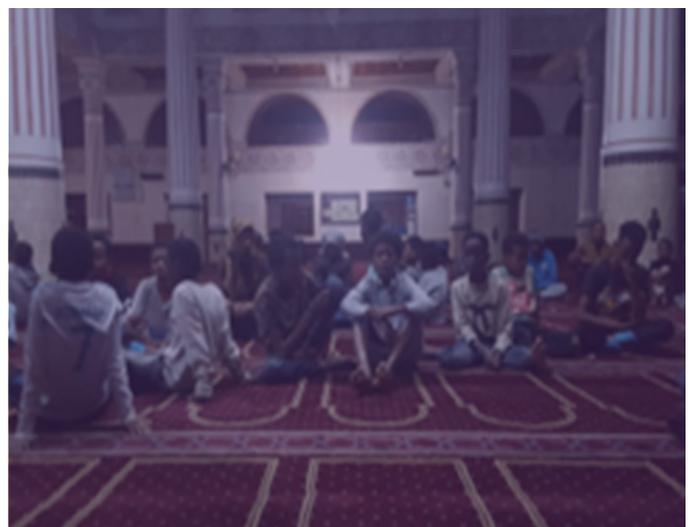
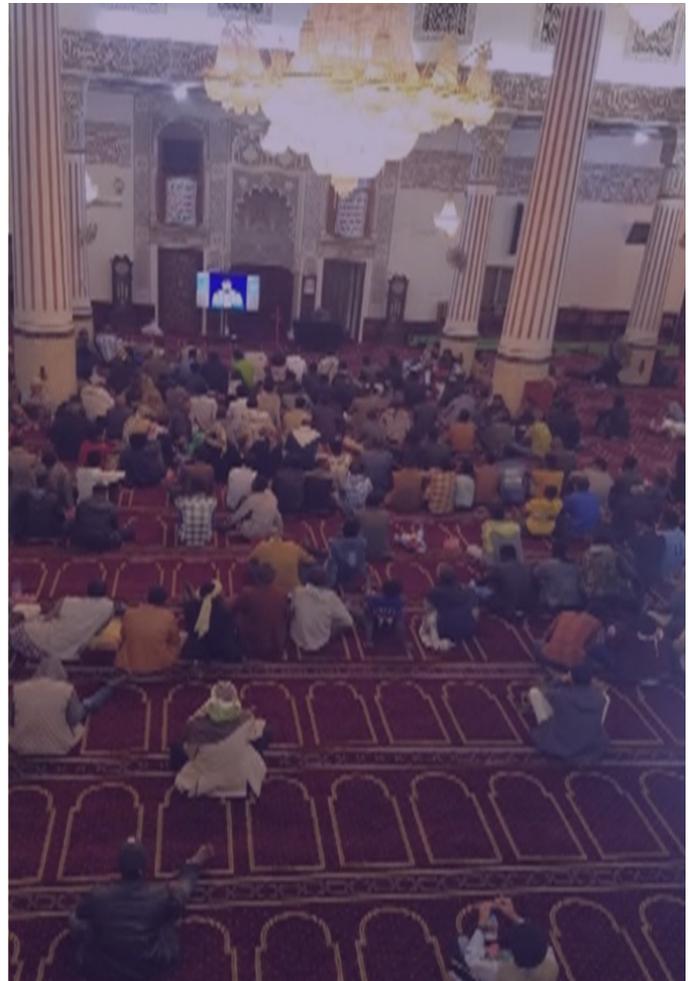


SUSPICIOUS HOUTHJI ACTIVITY AT THE MARTYRS' MOSQUE

The Houthis and their backers, Iran seek to dominate and control the Horn of Africa region by establishing a foothold at the entrance of the Red Sea, setting up military bases in the area, and spreading sectarian Shia ideology. Additionally, the Horn of Africa region is seen as a human resource reservoir that the militia aims to tap into to cover their shortages on the frontlines, making it a key objective for the militia in the region.

To achieve this, the Houthis have established camps and centers, with one of the most important being the Martyrs Mosque (located in Bab El-Yemen, Sanaa), where individuals, mainly Africans, are indoctrinated through sectarian courses referred to by the Houthis as "cultural courses".

During the war years, the Houthis have converted many mosques into centers for sectarian summer courses, political meetings, training camps, security and military checkpoints.



SUSPICIOUS HOUTHIS ACTIVITY AT THE MARTYRS' MOSQUE

The Role of the Martyrs' Mosque in Recruitment and Training

Here we review the suspicious activities of the Houthis in the Martyrs' Mosque, as the militia daily broadcast lectures by the deceased Hussein Badr El-Din Al-Houthi and Abdul Malik Al-Houthi on large screens to about 200 people of Ethiopian, Djiboutian, and Somali nationalities in the mosque during the nights of Ramadan in 2023.

On June 3, 2023, the Houthis in Sanaa taught a large number of African children in the Martyrs' Mosque sectarian courses and trained them in preparation to enlist them in the frontlines.

On August 4, 2023, the Houthis held a cultural course for the third batch (50 people) of Ethiopian and Somali nationalities in the first floor and basement of the Martyrs' Mosque. They were taught the notebooks of the deceased Hussein Al-Houthi and recorded lectures by Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi.



SUSPICIOUS HOUTHIS ACTIVITY AT THE MARTYRS' MOSQUE

African Revolt in the Mosque

The documents and information obtained by the Platform indicate that some African groups flocking to the Mosque recently disobeyed and refused the orders of the Houthis, in protest against the ongoing violations and ill-treatment they receive. This dramatic development in the relationship between the militia and Africans led to the Houthis carrying out a massacre inside the Mosque, resulting in the death of one Eritrean national, who was the leader of the group, and injuries to others.

Prior to those bloody events, 10 African elements (Somalis, Ethiopians and Eritreans) had arrived, some of whom were following the Somali Navy forces a month before that incident from the city of Hodeidah. These elements were receiving training on the coasts of the Red Sea in front of the province of Hodeidah by Houthi elements, some of which included swimming, especially focusing on covering distances of 4 to 5 kilometers. In return, the militia was paying them \$500 as monthly salaries.

After finishing the training, Hashem Al-Ghamari (Chief of Staff) issued instructions to summon those elements to Sanaa in order to join the Martyrs' Mosque. The purpose of their entry into the training center at the Mosque was to subject them to cultural and ideological courses, where they stayed at the mosque for about a month.

However, due to the racist nature of the Houthis, the treatment of Africans by members of that group was terrifying and inhumane, with threats and violence being used against them. This resulted in the group losing control, as the Africans refused to attend the lessons and demanded the presence of the person who had summoned them, Al-Ghamari. In response, riot control forces were sent to deal with them.

SUSPICIOUS HOUTHJI ACTIVITY AT THE MARTYRS' MOSQUE

The course of events that took place away from the media and international and Yemeni organizations concerned, indicates that a verbal altercation occurred between the leader of the Houthi group and the supervisor of the African group, resulting in the elimination of the supervisor of the group, who was the informant / Mohamed Ali Mohamed Alousen, known as Abu Muhandis (Eritrean - from Amhara region). He was recruiting and mobilizing people from the region of Afar and sending them to receive religious and military Houthis training courses in the city of Hodeidah. He was also active in smuggling weapons from the Horn of Africa to the Yemeni coasts under the control of the Houthis. Some members of the African group who were in the mosque were also injured.

The militia did not stop there, as they raided the house of Alousen, located in Sanaa, Al-Hasabah neighborhood, to search for any (videos, photos, and other items) that could be linked to the Houthis.

This incident shows the extent of slavery and persecution suffered by Africans in militia-controlled areas, and how the Houthis treat them as tools and fuel for their war, so they can be disposed of cold-bloodedly at any time and without reason, in a brutal and atrocious manner condemned by all divine and secular laws, falling under the category of war crimes.



BURNING REFUGEE DETENTION CENTERS AND DEPORTING IMMIGRANTS

Detention Center Fire Incident

On March 7, 2021, around 64 African migrants died in a fire in Yemen and more than 200 others were injured after security forces affiliated with the Houthis fired shells at an immigration detention center operated by the Immigration, Passports, and Nationality Authority in Sanaa.

Hospitals in the capital treated burns for hundreds of surviving migrants, most of whom were Ethiopians protesting their conditions at the center, amid heavy security presence that hindered the efforts of relatives and humanitarian agencies to reach the injured.

The reckless use of weapons by Houthis, which led to the death of dozens of Ethiopian migrants in a fire, serves as a terrifying reminder of the dangers faced by migrants in war-torn Yemen.

The Houthi group controls a large part of Yemen, including Sanaa. At least 6,000 migrants are being held captive throughout Yemen, with smugglers holding hundreds, if not thousands.

African migrants reported that the conditions of detention in the overcrowded facility were unhealthy, with up to 550 migrants being placed in a hangar in the facility. They said that they did not receive any sleeping mats, but were allowed to purchase mattresses from the guards. Food was limited and drinking water was scarce, forcing the detainees to drink from the toilet taps.

BURNING REFUGEE DETENTION CENTERS AND DEPORTING IMMIGRANTS

They said that the detainees organized a hunger strike after weeks of living in the overcrowded facility, protesting the conditions and continued detention. They added that the only way to be released was to pay a fee of 70,000 Yemeni rials (\$280) to the security guards. The migrants also described verbal abuses by the guards, including racial insults, threats, and repeated curses.

One member of the security force affiliated with the Houthis who arrived went up to the roof of the hangar, which housed open spaces, and fired two projectiles into the room.

The migrants said that the first projectile caused thick smoke and made their eyes tear up. The second one, which the migrants said it was a "bomb", exploded, creating a loud noise and igniting a fire that spread to the beds and blankets, burning some migrants alive.

Forced Deportation of Migrants

Due to the pandemic and the classification of migrants as carriers of the "coronavirus" virus, the Houthis have increased the (Forced Deportation) of migrants from the northern Yemeni provinces they control to the south, officially under the control of the internationally recognized Yemeni government.

In 2020, more than 15,000 migrants were forcibly expelled from the northern provinces to the south.

In April 2020, Houthi forces forcibly expelled thousands of Ethiopian migrants from northern Yemen, citing the coronavirus pandemic as a pretext. This resulted in the deaths of dozens and forced others to cross the border into Saudi Arabia. A network of smugglers, traffickers, and authorities has been documented to be kidnapping, detaining, and assaulting Ethiopian migrants, extorting them or their families for money.⁽³⁾

ADDITIONAL RISKS OF MIGRATION AND VOLUNTARY RETURN

Migration Risks

Migrants in Yemen suffer extreme deprivation, with limited access to food, healthcare, and safe shelter. Many are forced to live in temporary shelters or sleep on the streets, resorting to begging to survive.

This extreme vulnerability exposes over 60,000 refugees and asylum seekers, mostly from Somalia and Ethiopia, to abuse, exploitation, and gender-based violence.

The journey to Yemen poses additional risks, as many migrants fall victim to smugglers who promise them a safe journey but often expose them to serious dangers.

These risks continue even for those attempting to leave Yemen. In just October alone, over 1,900 migrants embarked on perilous journeys, either returning to their home countries in the Horn of Africa or being deported on boats.

According to IOM's Missing Migrants Project, at least 462 deaths and disappearances have been reported among migrants crossing the sea between Djibouti and Yemen so far this year. Additionally, 90 other migrant deaths have been documented along the Eastern Route in 2024, with many more likely unaccounted for.



ADDITIONAL RISKS OF MIGRATION AND VOLUNTARY RETURN

Voluntary Humanitarian Return Efforts

In response to the escalating humanitarian crisis in Yemen, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is working to expand the scope of the voluntary humanitarian return program, providing stranded migrants with a safe and dignified path to return to their homes. This expansion comes as more than 6300 migrants arrived in Yemen in October last year, according to the displacement tracking matrix of the IOM.

The IOM has conducted 30 chartered flights for voluntary humanitarian returns so far in 2024. This included one flight that departed from Aden on December 5th, safely transporting 175 migrants back to Ethiopia. These initiatives have helped approximately 4800 migrants return to their homes this year, providing them with a fresh start and an opportunity to rebuild their lives after enduring extremely difficult circumstances.

However, the increasing demand for these services requires the international community to provide greater commitment, as there is an urgent need for funding to ensure the continuity of these essential operations without interruption, and to provide a safe path for thousands of migrants who are still stranded in various parts of Yemen.

The Voluntary Humanitarian Return program, operated by the (IOM), provides essential support through migrant response points and community care facilities, as well as mobile teams that work along major migration routes to reach those in remote and underserved areas.

ADDITIONAL RISKS OF MIGRATION AND VOLUNTARY RETURN

Services range from healthcare and food distribution to providing shelter for the most vulnerable populations, basic hygiene kits, specialized protection assistance, and referring individuals to partner organizations when needed.

Despite these efforts, there are still significant gaps in services, given the limited number of active entities able to respond to the scale of needs.

The International Organization for Migration has launched its appeals for urgent additional funding to support the voluntary humanitarian return program for migrants in Yemen. Without this support, thousands of migrants will continue to live in dire conditions with limited options for safe return.

Greater cooperation from the international community and authorities is necessary to continue implementing these life-saving interventions and prevent further loss of life.

The voluntary humanitarian return program in Yemen, implemented by the (IOM), is currently funded by the US Population, Refugees, and Migration Bureau, the German Foreign Ministry, and the Norwegian government.⁽⁴⁾





RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthening Humanitarian Intervention:

- The need to create safe and humane passages to protect African migrants and ensure their arrival to safe areas;
- Increase support for international organizations to provide protection and health care for migrants;
- Allowing the (IOM) to arrange voluntary return of migrants in Yemen, ensuring that all organized return operations facilitated by UN humanitarian agencies are voluntary, and calling on donors to support the reintegration of returnees who have experienced psychological trauma upon their return to their countries;
- Donor governments should provide additional support to reintegrate migrants into their local communities to help those who have faced unimaginable horror and trauma at every step along the Gulf migration route.

2. Monitoring Violations:

- Monitoring and documenting all the horrifying violations committed by the Houthis against migrants, preparing a blacklist of all leaders, officials, and members involved in these violations and holding them accountable in accordance with the law and the constitution;
- Supporting efforts to document violations against migrants and submitting them to the Security Council and international forums.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Regional Cooperation:

- Collaboration and coordination with the governments of East African countries to combat human trafficking and military exploitation, prevent their migrants from joining the ranks of the Houthis and getting involved in smuggling operations of migrants, human and weapons trafficking, tightening border control on land and sea, and legal measures by those governments against their citizens involved in smuggling Africans;
- Raising awareness of the risks of illegal migration and the dangers of engaging in activities of the Houthis on the security of the Red Sea region and the safety of international trade through the strategic waterway;
- Supporting the legitimate Yemeni government and the Yemeni Coast Guard to combat illegal immigration through the Horn of Africa to Yemen, due to its security, economic and social risks to Yemen and the countries of the region;
- Enhancing cooperation between Yemen and Saudi Arabia to address the issues of African migrants smuggling, human trafficking, drug trafficking, and qat smuggling through the Kingdom's territories, as it serves the strategic interests of both countries and their peoples.

4. International Pressure on Houthis:

- Imposing international sanctions on Houthi leaders involved in exploiting migrants;
- Mobilizing the international community to stop the Houthis' inhumane practices.

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