



Justice4Yemen Pact
ميثاق العدالة لليمن



Musaala for Human Rights's Speech at the Human Rights Council in Geneva Highlights Road Closure Crisis in Marib.

July 1, 2024

Ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for your interest and presence today with us,

I stand before you today from Marib Governorate, which is suffering from the consequences of the nine-year-old conflict in Yemen.

I am talking about an urgent humanitarian issue that profoundly affects the lives of thousands of civilians, namely the closure of roads and its negative effects on innocent civilians. This situation requires all of us to take urgent attention and immediate action in accordance with the principles of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Marib, a province rich in oil and gas wealth, used to live in peace and stability. But the conflict, which erupted in late 2014, brought untold suffering to its population. Marib had four main roads linking the governorate with the rest of the governorates, and as a result of the ongoing conflict, three of them were closed and replaced by an alternative desert road, making access to and exit from the city almost impossible.

This alternative desert road extends over **a length of 150 km**, and it is completely unsafe and poses a great danger to travelers, first: because it is an unclear and non-vital road that is not suitable for the passage of trucks or passenger buses and does not have the lowest possible services for passengers, second: armed gangs and landmines that have been planted on separate areas of the road without signs indicating minefields, third, this desert road extends between the fronts Military of the parties to the conflict. For example, travel from the city of Marib to visit relatives and families to Sana'a did not exceed two hours before the closure of roads, and now requires a difficult and arduous journey that requires more than 10 hours to pass with the danger of mine explosion, extortion from armed gangs, and in many cases getting lost in the desert and running out of water and food supplies.

Regarding the main roads linking Marib Governorate with the capital, Sana'a:

- In mid-**2015**, the main road (Marib - Sirwah - Sana'a) was closed.
- On 1 February **2016**, the other main road (Marib - Nehm - Sana'a) was closed.



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In **September 2021**, Marib became in a state of almost complete siege, after it closed the third main road linking it to the capital, Sana'a and other governorates, Al-Juba -Al-Bayda Road, and its closure caused a siege that not only affected the daily movement of citizens, but also caused a stifling humanitarian crisis. Humanitarian aid that used to arrive easily in Marib is barely arriving, and medical aid arrives late, making access to health care a distant dream for thousands. Currently, it has been cut off, just as it did with the World Food Programme. This crisis affects not only the residents of the governorate, but also the displaced from all over the country, whose number according to recent statistics has reached more than two million.

The closure of Al-Juba - Al-Bayda Road continued until **June 9, 2024**, and recently this road was opened through local mediation initiatives after the parties to the conflict announced their agreement to open this road, while the main roads are still closed and have not been opened until this moment.

Imagine this scene with me: an entire governorate of more than two million people depends on a single desert road towards the capital Sana'a via Al-Jawf governorate, travelers from Marib through the desert are forced to spend long hours on a journey that used to take only a few hours, bearing the high costs, serious security risks and loss in the desert. Imagine the tragedy of children who have been deprived of education because of this blockade, according to the Executive Unit for the Management of IDP Camps there. More than **22,000 students** have been displaced from their areas, many of whom have not been able to attend school. Available schools are overcrowded and under-resourced, making quality education impossible.

The stories of human suffering in Marib are endless, pregnant women are forced to travel long distances to reach hospitals that lack basic equipment, sometimes leading to tragic deaths. Disabled children face great difficulties in moving and being treated through desert roads, which increases their suffering.

All this makes Marib a "large geographical prison", where citizens live in complete isolation from the rest of the country, trapped between battlefronts and closed roads. This inhumane situation requires all of us to stand together to open roads and deliver aid to those who deserve it.

On the humanitarian level, road closures have exacerbated the suffering of civilians, especially displaced people, who make up a large proportion of Marib's population. According to the IDP Camp Management Executive Unit, there are more than **17,883** IDPs suffering from infectious diseases **and 147** camps without a fixed clinic. These figures reflect a painful reality that denies residents access to basic health care and puts their lives at risk.



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منظمة مساءلة لحقوق الإنسان
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At the economic level, the restrictions on movement have led to an increase in the prices of basic commodities and an increase in transportation costs, doubling by **208%** at the end of **2020** compared to **2013**, and this increase is the result of insecurity, the destruction of roads and the payment of informal amounts at checkpoints.

The social impacts of road closures have contributed to a societal rift that has led to the disintegration of families, with men forced to flee while women and children remain at home, and children becoming homeless or breadwinners in the absence of adequate support.

Recommendations:

- We call on the international community to shoulder its responsibilities towards the humanitarian crisis in Yemen and work to end the suffering of civilians in Marib urgently and effectively. This is done by supporting local mediation initiatives to facilitate their humanitarian work to open roads in Yemen.
- We call on the international community and the Office of the UN Envoy to exert more efforts and pressure on the parties to the conflict to speed up the opening of the main roads in Yemen, the first of which are the Marib-Nehm-Sana'a and Marib-Sirwah-Sana'a roads.
- We call on the parties to the conflict in Yemen to work to neutralize roads and public services from the conflict and to facilitate citizens' access to health and education services.
- The Houthi Ansar Allah group must commit to handing over maps of mines and working with the competent authorities to remove them from the main roads.

This suffering flagrantly violates the principles of international humanitarian law and human rights law, particularly the rights to freedom of movement, the right to life, and the right to health care. We recall that international humanitarian law, particularly the Geneva Conventions, obliges parties to a conflict to protect civilians and ensure unhindered humanitarian access.

The suffering of our people in Marib is a human suffering that cannot be ignored. Let us work together to end this crisis and open the paths of hope and life for besieged citizens.

Thank you for listening.

Mahdi Balghaith,
President of Musaaala for Human Rights

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