



January 28, 2022

on the brink of famine, [according to](#) the U.N. refugee agency.

Yemen's history of internet shutdowns and censorship

According to Access Now's Shutdown Tracker Optimization Project (STOP), Yemen has accounted for at least 26 incidents of shutdowns between 2016 and 2020, some of which occurred as a result of targeted attacks by the warring parties in the conflict. In 2017 for instance, network disruptions [increased](#), most likely due to targeted attacks perpetrated by warring factions. In 2020, damage to a submarine fiber optic cable cut nearly 80 percent of internet capacity in Yemen, with many sources attributing the shutdown to sabotage by the Houthis, a rebel group involved in the conflict. Irrespective of the perpetrators, these shutdowns are in violation of the fundamental rights of the people of Yemen to express and access information in order to keep safe amid the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the prolonged conflict in the country.

Internet shutdown violates international human rights law

Internet shutdowns violate fundamental human rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and the right to peaceful assembly, among other civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights guaranteed by national, regional, and international frameworks.

Although Saudi Arabia is not party to some of these frameworks, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the legally-binding [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR), by virtue of its membership in the United Nations Saudi Arabia is obliged under international law to uphold and respect these universal human rights including the freedoms of opinion and expression, assembly, and access to information — offline and online. It is therefore imperative for Saudi Arabia and other members of the United Nations to refrain from measures such as the recent attack on Yemen's telecom infrastructure which violates the fundamental rights of people in the country.

Access to the internet and telecommunications is a lifeline in times of crises

The internet, social media platforms, and other telecommunications play a critical role in society, especially during times of social and political unrest, crises, and conflict. They provide spaces for communicating, public debate, seeking public information, reporting and documenting events, and holding governments accountable for their actions. Journalists, human rights defenders, civil society actors, and other relevant stakeholders count on the internet and digital platforms to monitor,



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document and report on conflicts, and provide emergency support and resources during health and humanitarian crises.

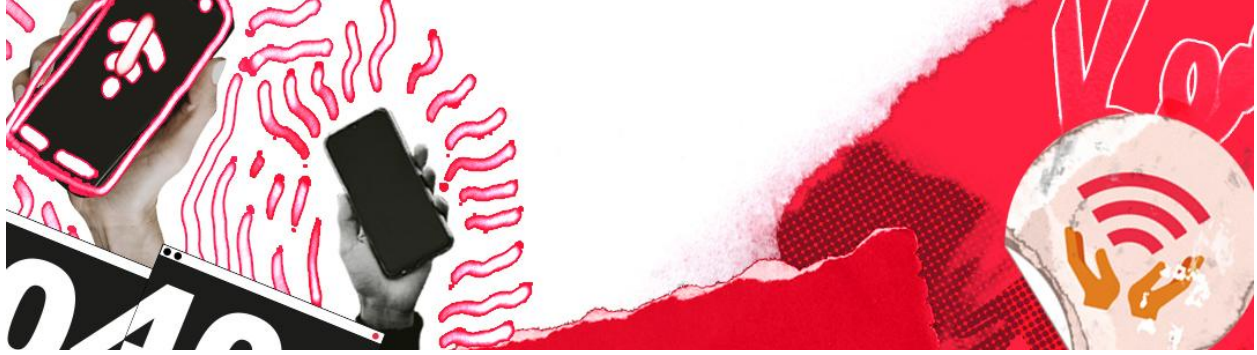
Recommendations

We urge **all parties to the conflict in Yemen** to:

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- 1. Stop targeting internet and telecommunication infrastructure causing communication blackouts in the country during the conflict;**
 - 2. Immediately facilitate conditions to enable the protection and security of all telecommunication and other civilian facilities in the country;**
 - 3. Depoliticize the telecommunications sector to remain neutral from warring parties as well as armed groups while recognizing internet access as an enabler of other fundamental human rights and needs at all times; and**
 - 4. Take necessary steps to increase and expand internet connectivity throughout Yemen by allowing internet service providers and telecom operators unfettered access to internet cables operating in the country.**
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To the **U.N. General Assembly**:

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- 1. Establish an independent and impartial mechanism to investigate and report on violations of applicable international human rights, including those impacted by internet shutdowns, and international humanitarian law and take all feasible precautions to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.**
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Sincerely,

ORGANIZATIONS

Access Now
Advocacy Initiative for Development (AID)
Africa Open Data and Internet Research
Foundation (AODIRF)
African Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX)
ARTICLE19
Business & Human Rights Resource Centre
(BHRRRC)
Common Cause Zambia
Committee to Protect Journalists
Digital Rights Kashmir
Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF)
International Press Centre (IPC)
Internet Protection Society, Russia
Kandoo

Kijiji Yeetu
Manushya Foundation
Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA
Zimbabwe)
Miaan Group
Mnemonic
Organization of the Justice Campaign
Sassoufit collective
SMEX
The Tor Project
Ubunteam
WITNESS
YODET

For more information, please contact:

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