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Following up: documented evidence on the Houthis' use of child soldiers in Yemen

From:

To:

Date: Tuesday, November 10, 2026, 3:31 PM (America/New_York)

Attachment: Houthi Terrorist Militias' Recruitment and Use of Children as Child Soldiers in Yemen.docx

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Following your conversation with Ambassador Marwan in October regarding the Houthis' use of child soldiers, I am sharing the attached briefing document. It compiles data, documented evidence, and international findings from UN Secretary-General reports, Security Council Panel of Experts findings, and NGO and Yemeni monitoring organizations.

We would be very interested in offering you an exclusive story on this topic. As we continue to gather hard evidence of these violations, I would be glad to share updates as they become available.

Please let me know if you would like to discuss this further or if I can help connect you with officials on the Yemeni side.

Best,

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Houthi Terrorist Militias' Recruitment and Use of Children as Child Soldiers in Yemen: International Findings and Documented Evidence

For more than a decade, children in the areas controlled by the Houthi terrorist militias have been drawn into armed conflict in ways the United Nations, international human rights organisations and Yemeni monitors have documented again and again. The militias still appear in the annex (B) of the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict for the recruitment and use of children, and the 2026 report, covering events in 2025, expresses particular concern about the number of children recruited by the Houthi militias and about their “summer camps for children. In this context, the SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict called upon Houthis, to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law and to cease attacks that affect civilians, including children. (UN Secretary-General 2026, A/80/723 S/2026/357, paras. 243 ,103 and annex B)

The Government of Yemen's National Defence Council designated the Houthis a terrorist organisation by Decision No. 1 of 22 October 2022 for the terrorist activities that the militia is undertaking. The United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have also designated the group as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.

What gives the subject its urgency now is the events on the ground in 2026. In October the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict warned that hostilities had intensified sharply, that more than 60 grave violations against children had been documented since 3 September, that at least 200,000 people had been displaced, and that reports of child recruitment were increasing (OSRSG-CAAC 2026). This Statement for the Press relies heavily on UN-verified data, reports of the Security Council's Panel of Experts on Yemen, international NGO investigations and Yemeni civil-society monitoring. It is significant to articulate one caveat here: the Panel of Experts has had no access to Houthi-controlled areas (UN Panel of Experts on Yemen 2025, para. 5), and the Secretary-General states plainly that verified figures do not show the full scale of violations, [meaning the numbers could be double, if not triple or quadrable] (UN Secretary-General 2026, paras. 2 to 3), The SRSG-CAAC also expressed concern that access challenges that severely hamper the monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children – as a result, the information presented herein does not represent the full scale of violations against children attributed to the Houthis. (UN Secretary-General 2026, A/80/723 S/2026/357, para 243)

Even within those limits, one finding keeps repeating in everybody of evidence: recruitment starts in the classroom. The Panel of Experts describes a systematic, multilayered system led by the General Mobilization Authority of the de facto Ministry of Defence, in which the de facto Ministry of Education runs summer camps and Qur'anic schools that indoctrinate children as young as seven, alongside changes to the school curriculum (UN Panel of Experts on Yemen 2025, para. 151). Recruitment also takes place at graduation ceremonies, workshops, reading circles and mosques (para. 36). Four years earlier the Panel had documented camps held in schools and a mosque, including one where children as young as seven were taught to clean weapons and to take cover from rockets, and it identified the de facto Ministers of Defence and Education as bearing responsibility (UN Panel of Experts on Yemen 2022, paras. 43 to 44). The Secretary-General's reports

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repeat the concern about camps exposing thousands of the Yemeni children to military content and activities (UN Secretary-General 2025a, paras. 40 and 75; 2026, para. 233).

Attendance at these camps is rarely left to free choice. Families who keep their children away from summer courses reportedly risk losing food baskets and subsidized cooking gas or being struck off aid lists, while students risk being denied diplomas; local tribal and neighborhood leaders enforce attendance, and the women's security network known as the Zaynabiyat pressures mothers to register and send their children to those camps (UN Panel of Experts on Yemen 2025, paras. 37 and 152). In 2021 the Panel recorded nine cases in which humanitarian assistance was given or withheld depending on whether a family's children fought, and ten cases in which children were taken to the front under the pretext of “cultural courses” (UN Panel of Experts on Yemen 2022, para. 43). Pressure was coupled with reward. Amnesty International found that local representatives faced recruitment quotas and that families were promised monthly payments of 20,000 to 30,000 rials (roughly US$80 to 120) if their son was killed (Amnesty International 2017).

Once drawn in, children move from the classroom to the training ground. According to the Panel, children as young as 10 receive about 40 days of ideological training, followed by roughly 45 days of military instruction for those aged 15 to 18, before deployment (UN Panel of Experts on Yemen 2025, para. 153). The UN verified one such case in January 2022: a 16-year-old boy in Sa'dah was recruited, put through military training, sent to the Marib front and killed (UN Secretary-General 2025a, para. 20). Roles reported by the Panel range from combat to driving, close protection, checkpoint duty, planting landmines, smuggling drugs and filming propaganda, and some children were reportedly given sedatives and Qat (sometime written as khat) (UN Panel of Experts on Yemen 2025, para. 153). Girls are recruited too, mainly by the Zaynabiyat, for searching homes, surveillance, espionage and logistics, including moving explosives (paras. 36 and 154). None of this is new. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International both documented armed boys at checkpoints in the early years of the war (Human Rights Watch 2015; Amnesty International 2017).

What has changed is the pace. The Panel reports that recruitment surged after 7 October 2023 and shifted towards coercion combined with incentives (UN Panel of Experts on Yemen 2025, para. 150). Activists interviewed by Human Rights Watch described school scouts and students taken to “culture centers,” lectured on jihad and then sent to military camps, with recruits as young as 13 (Human Rights Watch 2024). Not every child is forced: the Panel notes that some join out of economic necessity or because of indoctrination (UN Panel of Experts on Yemen 2025, para. 153).

How many children have passed through this system is far harder to establish. The figures in circulation come from four kinds of evidence with different methods, and they should not be added together. The strictest is UN verification. The Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting counts only cases it has verified individually, and on that basis, it attributed to the Houthis 345 verified cases of recruitment and use between 2021 and 2023 (UN Secretary-General 2025a, para. 17), 85 cases in 2024 (UN Secretary-General 2025b, para. 229) and 127 in 2025 (UN Secretary-General 2026, A/80/723–S/2026/357, para. 233), a rise of nearly half in one year. Human Rights Watch, citing UN data, puts the cumulative verified total for the Houthis since 2010 at no fewer than 1,851 (Human Rights Watch 2024). Because access is so constrained, these are minimum figures [and the numbers could be way higher than these].

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The Panel of Experts casts a wider net. It relies on confidential sources, caregivers and corroboration from more than one source (UN Panel of Experts on Yemen 2025, annex 1). It has reported lists, compiled largely from the Houthis' own death announcements, naming 1,406 Houthi-recruited children who died in 2020 and 562 who died between January and May 2021 (UN Panel of Experts on Yemen 2022, para. 123), and a list of 1,201 children recruited and trained (UN Panel of Experts on Yemen 2023, para. 98). In 2025 it reported that eight batches of around 7,000 children each had graduated since late 2023 (UN Panel of Experts on Yemen 2025, para. 153). That would amount to some 56,000 children.

Civil-society monitors have also produced larger totals. Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor and SAM for Rights and Liberties reported 10,333 children recruited by the Houthis from 2014 to 2020 across 19 governorates, of whom 248 were aged 8 to 11 and 3,838 aged 12 to 14 (Euro-Med Monitor and SAM 2021, 5 and 10). Yemeni monitors in the Justice4Yemen Pact investigated 70 recruitment cases in 2023 and said that summer camps had involved more than one million children that year (DT Institute and Justice4Yemen Pact 2024, 4). SAM's preliminary report for the third quarter of 2026 lists 222 children recruited and killed across 16 governorates (SAM 2026).

To sum up, furthest from verification are the Houthis' own claims. The group announced more than 70,000 new fighters in three months after October 2023 (Human Rights Watch 2024). The figure is not broken down by age and cannot be checked, so it shows the scale of mobilization rather than the number of children.

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PART III: KEY SOURCE DOCUMENTS

The seven documents below carry most of the evidentiary weight in this paper. Each is listed with its title, date, UN symbol where one exists, and a direct link.

1. Final report of the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen (2025)

Date: 17 October 2025 (letter dated 15 October 2025). Symbol: S/2025/650.

Most detailed account of the recruitment system: summer camps, the role of the de facto Ministries of Defence and Education, training durations, girls' recruitment, coercion through aid (paras. 36 to 37, 150 to 155).

https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/report/letter-dated-15-october-2025-from-the-panel-of-experts-on-yemen-addressed-to-the-president-of-the-security-council/n2523409.pdf

2. Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General (unedited advance version)

Date: 16 June 2026. Symbol: A/80/723–S/2026/357.

Latest UN-verified data (127 Houthi cases in 2025) and concern over summer camps (paras. 233, 243).

https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/sites/default/files/2026-06/S_2026_357_UNEDITED.pdf

3. Children and armed conflict in Yemen: Report of the Secretary-General

Date: 21 March 2025. Symbol: S/2025/113.

Country report for 2021 to 2023: 345 verified Houthi cases, training-camp pattern, action plan progress (paras. 17 to 20, 59 to 64).

https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4081436

4. Final report of the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen (2023)

Date: 21 February 2023. Symbol: S/2023/130.

Finds recruitment and training in summer camps continued after the April 2022 action plan (paras. 95 to 98).

https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4004108

5. Final report of the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen (2022)

Date: 26 January 2022. Symbol: S/2022/50.

Documents summer camps, deception through "cultural courses", aid conditionality and death lists of child recruits (paras. 42 to 44, 123).

https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3956342

6. Human Rights Watch, "Yemen: Houthis Recruit More Child Soldiers Since October 7"

Date: 13 February 2024. No UN symbol.

Activist testimony on the post-October 2023 surge and recruitment through schools and "culture centers".

https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/13/yemen-houthis-recruit-more-child-soldiers-october-7

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7. Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor and SAM, *Militarized Childhood*

Date: February 2021. No UN symbol.

Largest civil-society dataset (10,333 cases, 2014 to 2020) with age and method breakdowns; methodology only partly disclosed.

https://euromedmonitor.org/uploads/reports/childrenyemenrepen.pdf

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