

# Yemen through the lens of Hayat Al-Sharif

By Hayat Al-Sharif

**Hayat Al-Sharif is the award winning and internationally recognized photographer who since the beginning of 2023 is welcomed by Stavanger as the city's ICORN resident for the next two years.**



"Photography in Yemen is an art full of dangers" says Hayat Al-Sharif. Photo: Redhwan Alsharif.

**The photographer is an artist. I present my art through my pictures and they carry many stories behind each picture**

When I started my photography journey, I travelled through seven governorates to document Yemeni heritage, handcraft and art. I initialized my work with aid from an artisans organization based in Washington DC. After the war started, I have been working with humanitarian projects to illustrate stories of the suffering of Yemeni women and children.

My art is to tell stories. I documented a project for the "Prince Claus" called "The Impossible Fire" in which

I have taken pictures that express the struggle and necessities of the fire in order to cook. To make bread in such difficult conditions as in the war-torn Yemen is about a struggle. The lack of domestic gas prompts many women to go on a search for firewood, cartons, their childrens school books and plastic boxes to set a fire. They have to make bread - which in a war country is the only meal during the day. Documenting this captures moments of real suffering such as the ones experienced by the women and children of Yemen.

Through this photographic art, I send a message to the outside world in order to assist on stopping this war that has been going on for almost nine years. But photography

in Yemen is an art full of dangers. The country has a very high illiteracy rate, and the people are linked to customs and traditions that prohibit women from working.

Women are not allowed to speak or write on social or political issues. The society is aggressively fighting women's work. Writing in Yemen is considered a crime by the authorities. The government use force against writers, you are not allowed to write, take pictures or speak.

Yemen violates the freedom of the press and journalists are killed, imprisoned and tortured. In Yemen if you wish to live, you have to have no voice!



Hanan, 23 years old and Nada 24 years old, both from the capital Sana'a. They wear flowers to send a message to the world that we are peaceful country and we want to live in peace in our peaceful Yemen. The photo was taken in 2020. *All photos in this article by Hayat Al-Sharif.*



Al Taweelah District is located in Al Mahwit Governorate, a Yemeni governorate located northwest of the capital, Sana'a. Most of the residents live in high mountainous areas that depend on firewood from the mountains. Women suffer from difficulty in obtaining firewood and water because of the large and dangerous mountains. Photo was taken on January 2nd, 2022.

## YEMEN

Yemen is an Arab country located in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula. The current population is 31,684,042. Yemen used to be known as Arabia Felix, which in latin refers to happy or fortunate Arabia. It used to be the most fertile out of all the lands in the region, which stabilized the population and country for a long time. Capital is Sana'a, one of the world's oldest cities.

### When the war started

In March 2015 the war on Yemen began with explosions everywhere. The sky and earth in Sanaa became a piece of hell.

The infrastructure collapsed and the electricity was cut off. Everything changed. Our situation in Yemen turned into great fear. Oil, gas, flour and all the necessities of life disappeared. Light went and darkness came. Nine years until today, every Yemeni has been living their worst nightmare. The conflict has had an impact on health, education, communications, the Internet and transportation. Suddenly everyday life was reversed to ancient times. The conflict in Yemen has greatly affected the lives of women and children. Women lost all their rights and got busy searching for firewood, plastic cans and cartons in order to light a fire to make bread for their children. These children were also

deprived of their rights and at a young age forced to work looking for firewood and fetching water from long distance areas.

All conflicting parties, from North to South, including the Houthis (allies of Iran), the government (allies of Saudi Arabia), Southern separation groups supported by the UAE, the Islah party, the former regime and other groups are fighting journalists. We are traumatized by the war, but also psychologically from being prevented to work. We are put in front of two options. The first is to be arrested or killed if we go out with a camera. The second option is to remain unemployed and that you and your family die of starvation.



**Zahraa Ahmed** is 49 years old. She climbs trees in the dangerous mountains and cuts trees with an ax to light a fire and make bread for her children. This photo shows the life of Yemeni women in rural areas, doing hard and exhausting work all day long. Yemeni women are victims of ignorance, war, siege and high prices. Marginalization of Yemeni women and depriving them of their right to education, work, political participation and decision-making must be placed in the priorities of the international community to stand with and advocate for women. The photo was taken in October 2021.



**Nagham Abdulllah** is 10 years old. She lives in Houd Al Hanash, Al Mahwit Governorate. Her mission is to collect the fodder left over from the fields and then carry the tune of this fodder for long distances. She walks with it between the agricultural terraces until she reaches the house to dry it under the sun to feed the livestock and cows in the winter.

The children of Yemen participate in the troubles of daily life. The situation in Yemen forces them to abandon their rights to education and play. They only do the role of adults and live the struggle of a difficult life. The humanitarian situation in war and siege has put children in a closed circle surrounded by a dark future for future generations. The photo was taken in October 2021.



Sharif is eight years old, he holds a flower of peace in his hand to express his fear of the airstrikes targeting Yemen. The photo was taken in October 2020.

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Sharif wants to send a message to stop targeting children  
by airstrikes while they are sleeping in their homes



Fatima, 10 years old, from Al Mahwit Governorate. She is, despite her young age, strong. Fatima collects wood from the big mountains and ties the wood to make it easier to carry on her shoulder and walk long distances. After five hours, Fatima got this amount of wood to make dinner with her mother. January 2nd, 2022



Fatima and her daughter Nada use firewood as well as books and some papers to light the fire to make food for their family. "During the war, we learned how to be patient, how to resist diseases, hunger and how to fight for survival. It is true that the difficulties are many, but we will not give up, we Yemeni women can symbolize power, motherhood and courage", Fatima said. The photo was taken in 2019.