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The American Community in Yemen

The Embassy Community

The American Embassy community in Sanaa counts 36 American employees, plus their families, and more than 180 locally hired Yemeni and other nationals. The Department of States, US Information Service, the Social Security Administration, the Agency for International Development and the Department of Agriculture operate programs in Yemen under the authority of Ambassador Barbara K. Bodine. In addition to permanently assigned personnel, the Embassy usually has almost a dozen long-term temporary employees at any given time. In addition, currently a 15 person US military unit in Aden is training their Yemeni counterparts in humanitarian demining.

The Chancery, the Ambassador's Residence, Marine House, and associated buildings occupy a spacious compound in north Sanaa. Completed in 1989, the facility is the first Embassy designed and built to full "Inman standards" – the security guidelines developed following the bombings of the US Embassy in Beirut in the early 1980s. The buildings enjoy ample set back and solid construction, as well as many design elements that reflect the rich architectural heritage of Yemen.

The Private American Community

About 15,000 American citizens reside in Yemen. The large majority of them are dual US – Yemeni nationals who live in the mountainous areas of Ibb governorate south of Sanaa. These Americans reflect the large number of Yemenis who emigrated to the United States in the 1950s and 60s. Most of them settled around Detroit, where they worked in the automobile factories, or in California where they first did agricultural labor and gradually became small businessmen. Emigration has been a long tradition in Yemen, although many Yemenis who have worked their whole lives abroad will leave their families here and return themselves upon retirement. These Yemeni-Americans are fully integrated into their local society, and not even in times of trouble, such as the 1994 Civil War do they desire Embassy assistance.

There are perhaps 400 expatriate residents in Yemen. Most of them work in the oil industry. Yemen Hunt Oil is the largest employer of Americans in Yemen. There is also a small group of Americans who run a hospital in Jibla, Ibb governorate, associated with the American Baptist Church. They have provided quality medical service to the people of that region for over 30 years. Another American NGO associated with the Seventh Day Adventist Church runs a maternal/child health project in Hodeida governorate, near the Red Sea coast. Finally, the Sanaa International School has provided an American school environment for over 25 years. The school goes from grades K-12 with a student enrollment of about 165 children.

Despite occasional security concerns that limit travel, Americans in Yemen often spend weekends and holidays touring the country – the picturesque mountain villages near Sanaa, the stark but beautiful Wadi Hadramaut in the east, and the unspoiled beaches on the Red Sea and the Gulf.

Health: The Impact of One Visionary Minister

The Republic of Yemen currently is blessed with a vigorous and visionary health care reform pioneer in its Minister of Public Health, Dr. Abdullah Abdul Wali Nasher. Since becoming Minister in May 1997, Dr. Nasher has decentralized the Ministry's budget, introduced openly advertised, merit-based hiring practices, turned around a miserable public hospital by putting the right manager in place, and outlined his priorities to improve and expand Yemen's minimal health care system. In September 1998, Dr. Nasher officially launched a comprehensive health care reform program in Yemen. As Dr. Jacques Baudouy, World Bank Director of Human Development for the Middle East and North Africa said, it was the first time he had ever seen a reform strategy developed without World Bank participation.

The Ministry's program was driven by Yemen's woeful health care statistics, including the worsening of some health indicators, such as malnutrition, during this decade, and a government per capita health care budget of about \$3.00. Yemen's budget problems exacerbate the lack of essential drugs and services, an immunization rate of less than 28%, and poor geographic access. Because of its extensive high mountainous regions, only 30% of Yemen's rural population has access to health care; only 50% of Yemen's total population has access overall.

Maternal and child health indicators are particularly dire, and compare poorly against those of other countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Some statistics:

Maternal mortality rate:	1,000-1,400 per 100,000 births
Fertility rate:	6.5
Prenatal care:	26%
Postnatal care:	5%
Contraceptive Prevalence Rate:	13%

Comparative Statistics (from UNICEF's State of the World's Children 1999)

		Yemen	Egypt	Jordan
Under 5 Mortality Rate 1997 (per 1,000 live births):	100	73	24	
Percentage of low birth weight newborns (1990-97)	19%	10%	7%	
Percentage of births attended by trained personnel 1990-97		43%	56%	97%
		Yemen	Egypt	Jordan
Percentage of women immunized for tetanus (1990-97)		17%	61%	40%

The fundamental aims of Yemen's health care reform program are:

- Make health care less expensive by providing good quality health services closer to where people live and decreasing the cost of drugs. Drugs and transportation are the two highest health care costs to patients, making up between 64 and 82% of out-of-pocket health care expenditures.

- Emphasize preventive health services, which offer a much higher cost savings than curative care. Many cases of infant and child mortality could have been prevented through timely immunizations and treatment.
- Make more efficient use of limited government resources through improved budgetary and management systems, including decentralization of funding and authority to the district level -- closer to where the people who need those services live.
- Limit the government's service delivery role to what is financially and technically feasible. Encourage private sector health providers and NGO health providers to work in partnership with the Ministry of Public Health in meeting national health goals.
- Increase resources flowing into the government health care sector by allocating more funds from the national budget, and by introducing cost-sharing and community financing schemes.
- Develop health policies and implementation strategies that target adequately the needs of women. Yemen's low female-to-male health provider ratio makes it culturally difficult for Yemeni women to access health care. Staff hiring and incentive policies, monitoring indicators and all aspects of the Ministry's work need to become gender-sensitive.

Dr. Nasher's accessibility and vision have led to a dramatic increase in both bilateral and multilateral activity in the health sector over the past several years. For example, USAID's Options for Family Care project trained and graduated 220 community midwives in the governorates of Hajjah, Hodeidah and Hadhramaut, and have renovated and equipped 22 maternal and child health units in district health centers. Continuing assistance in the health sector is vital to Yemen's goal of reducing its population growth rate.

The Status of Women in Yemen Their Entry into the Political Arena

Yemeni women rank low on almost every significant index of human development, except for political rights. Women do not have acceptable access to basic health services, education, safe water, or adequate nutrition. They have unacceptably high birth and illiteracy rates. The Constitution makes no difference between men and women, but tradition serves to isolate them and limit the exercise of their talents. But Yemeni women do have the right to vote and have exercised it—the only women in the Arabian Peninsula who can claim this distinction. In addition, numerous signs point to a better future. Small groups of Yemeni women, with varying degrees of government support, are determined to find a way out of the cycle of poverty and ignorance experienced by most women.

Government policy supports the development of women in all sectors, but implementation is slowed by resource constraints and ingrained attitudes among the men. All political parties have issued communiqués supporting female political participation, which has established an agreed baseline that cannot be reversed. But none of the parties include women in its senior governing council; only one party nominated female candidates in the 1997 parliamentary elections. Women do not occupy ministerial or sub-ministerial policy making positions, but do now hold about 10 percent of all office directorships. Less than three percent of judges are women, and all those are remnants of the former Marxist regime in the south.

The Social System Seeks to Protect, Not Empower Women

The population of Yemen is rural, poor, and socially conservative. Only 40 percent of girls between the ages of 6-15 attend school. Women represent of 24 percent and 13 percent respectively of secondary and university students. The law requires that a girl be 15 years old in order to marry, but 12-year old brides are not uncommon. Arranged marriages are the norm, although the woman may theoretically refuse a proposed husband. The law requires that a woman have her father's or husband's permission to travel abroad, although this is rarely enforced. The attitudes of a woman's male relatives are critical in determining the degree of social and economic freedom she enjoys, including how much education she receives. Violence against women exists, as it does everywhere, but is largely undocumented. The legal system does not effectively protect women from violence – that is the responsibility of her extended family.

Yemeni women and their families interpret the Quranic injunction to dress modestly in different ways. The majority of women fully cover themselves in black, including a face veil that reveals only their eyes. The rest cover their heads with the scarf ("hejab") and wear either a long black coat or modified western dress of a long skirt with long jacket. Dress does not unduly hinder women's activities. In Yemen, unlike Saudi Arabia, women can drive and move freely in public. They are evident in the streets and marketplaces of the city, as one journalist put it, "they walk without apology." University classes are coeducational, although from grades 6-12, boys and girls tend to study in separate classes or schools.

Official statistics state that women constitute about 21 percent of the workforce. This badly under-represents women's economic activity. Albeit unpaid, women do most of the manual work on family farms – and agriculture supports about 80 percent of the population.

Hope is in the Vote and Leadership Development

Yemen is the only country on the Arabian Peninsula with a functioning, multi-party Parliament elected by universal suffrage. In two separate parliamentary elections, in 1993 and 1997, Yemen's women have demonstrated that they take seriously the right to vote, to run as candidates, and to govern. Energetic and determined women staff NGOs devoted to empowering women.

Electoral Participation: They Need an "Emily's List"

More than 475,000 registered to vote in the first post-unity elections in 1993 (the total number of registered voters was 2.5 million), about 17 percent of all adult women. By 1997, the number of women registered had doubled to more than 825,000, 28 percent of all eligible adult women. Female voter registration to this extent was remarkable given that only about 26 percent of Yemeni women can read and write. The number of women who actually turned out to vote, however, was substantially lower than the registration figures would have predicted – no more than half actually cast a ballot in 1993 or 1997. Voter education was inadequate for all voters; particularly so for women. Also, political parties did not follow through with promises to recruit female candidates, which might have attracted more female voters.

In 1993, 41 of approximately 3,000 candidates for Parliament were women, most of whom ran as independents. Of the nearly 20 parties that competed, only two, President Saleh's GPC (General People's Congress) and the YSP (Yemeni socialist party – the governing party of the former South Yemen) nominated women. The GPC nominated two, and the YSP four. Two women won seats, both from the YSP. By 1997, the internal political context had changed, presenting new challenges for women. The YSP boycotted the election, which meant a loss of women candidates and an overall low voter turnout in the southern governorates, the YSP's traditional power-base. Islaah, the second major political party in the 1997 election, is an Islamist party that does not endorse female candidates, although it heavily recruited them to participate as registration and poll workers and has since allowed three to sit on one of its internal advisory councils. The GPC and a couple of small parties put forward a few women candidates, but most withdrew prior to election day. The two women who won seats were both from the GPC and from Aden, a city in which women have historically had more opportunities for education and political participation than elsewhere in Yemen.

The 1993 and 1997 elections proved that to be successful, women candidates must have the backing of a major party. With the exception of the GPC, no other party will "risk" a seat on a female candidate. The GPC is actively grooming more women for party leadership, has appointed one to sit on an eight-person executive council, but as noted above, none yet sits in the top council, and the GPC's commitment to nominate more women is as yet untested.

Women in Government: Beyond Tokenism, not Yet at Critical Mass

The most senior woman in government is Amat Al-Alim Al-Souswa, previously Under Secretary of Information and recently named Yemen's first female ambassador – as deputy permanent representative to Yemen's UN mission in Geneva. Al-Souswa headed Yemen's delegation to Beijing in 1995; in the years since, she has worked diligently to apply the principles of Beijing inside Yemen. The Prime Minister recently ordered each minister to have at least one woman office director, to promote women's affairs. There are already 95 female directors-general in the ministries, include the head of legal affairs in the Ministry of

Planning and the head of the Humanitarian Demining Program in the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs. The Foreign Ministry has perhaps the most high-ranking women, with 32 women diplomats. Not surprisingly, the number and seniority of women in various ministries reflects the social and political views of the ministers. The profile is best in those ministries headed by western-educated techno-reformers. There are no women in the military or security services. There are 32 women judges in Aden, but Islamists have successfully prevented the naming of female judges in northern Yemen. There are two female parliamentarians, one of whom, Dr. Oras Sultan Naji, along with Amat Al-Alim Al-Souswa invited the First Lady to visit Yemen.

The Pioneering Work of NGOs

Although few in number, NGOs dedicated to advance women's rights and participation in politics have had a positive impact. In early 1996, Sanaa University professor Raufa Hassan and three men activists formed the Arab Democratic Institute (ADI). In the run-up to the 1997 elections, ADI organized domestic election monitoring, voter-education, and women's education projects. Dr. Raufa has since broken with the ADI but has been instrumental in founding other NGOs, and her Center for Women's Studies has initiated work in train-the-trainer programs for women, focus group surveys, and other programs that would be considered advanced even in the West.

The Yemeni Institute for Democracy Development (YIDD) also participated in civic education prior to the 1997 elections and studied female voting patterns, which revealed that Yemeni women routinely voted for the same candidate as their husband or father. YIDD's work showed that in order to bring women further into the process, special materials and methods will have to be developed for them.

Other female-dominated NGOs focus on disseminating information on family planning as well as charitable activities, important contributions to building civil society.

At the instigation of Yemen's Beijing delegation, the government in 1996 created the National Women's Committee to assist in formulating policies to implement the Beijing recommendations. The Women's Committee has its own budget and reports directly to the Council of Ministers. Prominent Yemeni women from politics, business and government belong – most not only hold down full-time jobs, but also work full-time on the side at building the capacity of NGOs. Ambassador Amat Al-Alim Al-Souswa acts as chair. While not a true NGO, the NWC has broad-based representation and shows all the signs of a nascent NOW.

Freedom of Religion

An Islamic State; A Tradition of Tolerance

The Yemeni Constitution declares Islam the state religion and Islamic Shari'ah as the source of all legislation. Virtually all citizens are Muslims, either the Zaidi branch of Shi'a or the Shafa'i branch of Sunni, representing about 25% and 75% respectively of the total population. There are also a few thousand Ismailis in the north. Approximately 500 Jews, representing the remnants of one of the oldest Diaspora communities in the world, are scattered in a handful of villages between Sanaa and Sa'ada in northern Yemen. Almost all Christians are temporary foreign residents, except for a few Adeni families who trace their origins to India. There are also a few Hindus in Aden who also trace their roots to India.

The Constitution confirms Yemen's adherence to the International Declaration of Human Rights and guarantees that all citizens shall have equality of opportunity in political, economic and cultural fields. The Government generally respects this right in practice. Yemen is so overwhelmingly Muslim that societal discrimination is extremely limited. Yemen's tiny number of religious minorities live in reasonable harmony with their Muslim neighbors. They are free to worship according to their beliefs and to wear religiously distinctive ornaments or dress. Nor is there any evidence of violence or discrimination between the adherents of the two main Islamic sects. Religiously motivated violence is neither incited nor tolerated by Islamic clergy and leaders in Yemen.

Public schools do provide instruction in Islam, and not in other religions. However, almost all non-Muslims are expatriates who attend private schools. Jews are allowed to instruct their children in Judaism. Under Islam, the conversion of a Muslim to another religion is considered apostasy, a crime punishable by death. However, there are no known cases in which the crime has been charged or prosecuted by Government authorities. There are no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

The Jewish Community – Here Since the Beginning

The Jews are the only indigenous religious minority. Descendants of one of the oldest Diaspora communities in the world, their numbers have diminished dramatically – from several tens of thousands to a few hundred – due to voluntary emigration over the last fifty years. Although the law makes no distinction and Jews are accorded full rights as citizens, they are traditionally restricted to living in one section of a city or village and are often confined to a limited choice of employment, usually farming or handicrafts (with 80% of the Yemeni population rural farmers, this is not a major distinction). Jews are allowed to and do own real property. They are respected for their craftsmanship and their silver work is highly prized. Traditionally, tribal leaders in regions in which the Jews reside are responsible for protection of the Jews in their area. A failure to properly provide this protection is considered a serious personal dishonor.

The Christian Community – Foreign and Transient

Almost all Christians are temporary foreign residents, except for a few Adeni families of Indian origin. Several churches and Hindu temples operate in Aden. No non-Muslim public places of worship exist in the former North Yemen, largely because the north does not have a history of a large, resident expatriate community as the former British Colony, Aden, does. However, Christian church services are regularly held without harassment in private homes or facilities such as schools, and these facilities appear adequate to accommodate the small numbers involved. Although the Government does not allow the building of new non-Muslim

public places of worship, last year Yemen established diplomatic relations with the Vatican and agreed to the construction and operation of a "Christian Center" in Sanaa.

Christian missionaries operate in Yemen and most are dedicated to the provision of medical services. Invited by the Government, the Sisters of Charity run homes for the poor and disabled in Sanaa, Taiz, Hodeidah and Aden. They have been invited to open additional homes. The Government issues residence visas to priests so they may provide for the community's religious needs. There is also a German Christian charitable mission in Hodeidah, and a Dutch Christian medical mission in Sa'ada. An American Baptist congregation has run a hospital in Jibla for over thirty years. The Anglican Church in Aden also runs a charitable clinic. The Seventh Day Adventists operate a medical NGO, with some USAID funds, in the rural areas of Hodeidah Governorate.

Occasionally individual elements of the security authorities, apparently acting without orders, have subjected clergy to observation, sometimes reading their mail, ostensibly prevent proselytizing. The Government took swift action to arrest the deranged individual who murdered three nuns from the Sister's of Charity in Hodeidah in 1998.

Embassy Activity

The Embassy enjoys an active dialogue on human rights issues with both the Government of Yemen and with NGOs and other individuals. No specific action in support of religious freedom has been indicated given the Government's and society's general tolerance of its religious minorities. Embassy officers, up to and including the Ambassador, meet from time to time with representatives of the Jewish and Christian communities in Yemen.

Yemen: Meeting with President Ali Abdullah Saleh

Context

Ali Abdullah Saleh has been President of Yemen for 20 years. When he succeeded President Gashmi, assassinated by agents of the Marxist government in South Yemen, the 30-something Army Lieutenant Colonel was written off as a compromise, interim leader who would last no more than six months. He delights in knowing that he confounded the pundits, in Yemen and abroad. In the two decades he has been in power he has: expanded the authority of the central government, once restricted to the Sanaa-Hodeidah-Taiz triangle; staved off an invasion by the South Yemenis; defeated a southern-supported insurrection; negotiated a peaceful unification with the south following the collapse of its patron, the Soviet Union, in 1990; and, defeated a Saudi-backed secessionist Civil War in 1994. He has, at the same time, instituted a democratic reform movement that includes universal suffrage; committed Yemen to a series of IMF-supported economic reform measures that have brought its macro-economic profile into international standard; and, operating on a philosophy of "big tent" inclusiveness, kept otherwise destabilizing domestic forces in check.

Yemen has serious problems. It has virtually no natural resources, an exploding population growth rate, endemic illiteracy, inadequate health care and a primitive infrastructure. Domestically, because of a lack of governmental control of all of its territory, Yemen has been plagued as a safe haven for international terrorist elements. (Counterterrorism is a major area of the US-Yemen dialogue and cooperation). Despite Yemen's economic reforms, there is no economic growth and no appreciable investment, foreign or otherwise. Yemen is highly dependent on donor assistance but receives one of the lowest per capita assistance rates in the world. Its decision to oppose Desert Shield/Desert Storm in 1990 cost Yemen dearly in direct material terms – foreign aid was cut off from all quarters – and unraveled many of its political links, as well.

The rebuilding of our bilateral relationship has included improved military cooperation. The US Navy has a bunkering contract in Aden and there is a commercial fuels storage arrangement. We do limited English language and basic unit training, but do not and do not plan to sell any advanced weapons systems. The core activity is our support to the Yemeni Humanitarian Demining Program, both through training Yemeni deminers and participating in mine awareness and survivors assistance.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Saleh has been trying to dig Yemen out of that hole for 9 years. The Democracies Forum, the recent decision by Kuwait to re-establish full diplomatic relations, the re-initiation of some Arab assistance and, of course, your visit, all reflect the President's efforts to turn around Yemen's reputation and legitimize the domestic reforms he has implemented. Saleh is very sensitive to perceptions of "respect." He accepts that Yemen does not have the strategic value of the GCC states, but believes there is a certain minimum level of attention that should be accorded Yemen, none the less. He believes President Clinton extended an invitation to Washington in 2000 when they met briefly at King Hussein's funeral.

Yemen's traditional support for Iraq, if not for Saddam Hussein, has been the crux of the problem. The Yemeni-Iraqi relationship goes back decades. In geo-political terms, Iraq provides balance to Saudi Arabia. Both Yemen and Iraq overthrew their hereditary leaders, and British colonialism; neither has the oil wealth of the Gulf Arab states. There are also historical links that go back centuries. That said, the decision to gamble – and lose – considerable financial support from the Saudis, the Gulf Arabs and the West and oppose the

deployment of coalition forces in 1990 remains a mystery. It has been only in the last year and a half that Yemen has more publicly and clearly stood with the international community. Yemen still opposes the use of force and is concerned about the plight of the Iraqi people, but it also clearly calls on Iraq to comply with UN resolutions and supports the cause of the Kuwaiti POWs. There was a serious imbroglio this past December when Yemen damned the US/UK air strikes against Baghdad. That public position threatened to revert Yemen to its 1990 status. But Yemen walked back from the brink at the January 1999 Arab League Ministerial, where it played a positive and constructive role.

Saleh – the Man

Saleh has grown into his job. He has the self-confidence to democratize his country under the most adverse of political circumstances and surrounds himself with well-educated, competent advisors and ministers. Saleh is intense, animated and direct. He watches his guests closely and judges body language and the impact of his words. He expects his interlocutors to do the same. He can “dish it out, but he can also take it.”

Areas of Interest

Saleh will want to be assured of the US's continued commitment to supporting Yemen's democratization and economic reform. He is not unmindful of the education and health care needs of the Yemeni people, and is fully supportive of girls' education, maternal and child health care, reproductive issues, including child spacing and increased women's participation in the political process. He will be looking for signs that we are ready to back our stated concerns in these areas with continued funding for USAID program beyond FY 2000, and will be interested in whether the Peace Corps will return. He is pleased with the 416(b) wheat flour donation, monetized for development programs at about \$15 million and will look for commitment for further donations. He is sensitive on human rights issues, but nonetheless, willing to engage in a dialogue. He will be looking for confirmation that he will be invited to Washington sometime in 2000 (after the October 1999 presidential elections here).

Talking Points

- Pleased to be in Yemen and to participate in a landmark forum celebrating the expansion of democracies to all parts of the world. Yemen has been a leader in democracy, including universal suffrage, in this region. All democracies are “a work in progress;” the commitment of your Government is commendable.
- Equally impressive is the willingness of your government and people to engage in an open dialogue on the evolution of democracy, human rights and civil society. So long as Yemen faces its problems head-on, it can continue to move forward.
- The challenges your country faces are daunting. We are mindful of the economic difficulties besetting Yemen and that you have stayed the course on reform measures. We are pleased that we could provide 416(b) wheat flour and that we have been able to extend our USAID program until FY 2000, particularly in the fields of education and mother and child health care.
- We commend Yemen's active support for the elimination of landmines and your own program to remove landmines from Yemen. We are glad to be a part of that effort.
- Both the State Department and USAID are currently exploring ways to extend that program, including the scholarship program, into the new millennium.
- While further assessment is required, we are hopeful that conditions will permit the return of Peace Corps to Yemen soon.
- President Clinton and I look forward to seeing you in Washington sometime after the New Year.

Children's Issues: Not Exploitation, but Economics

The Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG) is aware of the problem of young children in the workplace, but is at odds on how to effect changes in its child labor situation in the short run. Yemen in 1991 signed the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, and is also a signatory to Arab conventions on children's rights. Since late 1997, the ROYG has been working proactively with UNICEF, WHO and the ILO to draft a national strategy on child labor. The strategy and its associated law have not yet been finalized. Yemen has been stymied in its efforts to achieve substantial progress on this issue by other overarching priorities, such as its stagnant economy.

Yemen's child labor problem is largely the result of a distressed national economy that cannot provide schools for all children or jobs for all adults who need work. Most of Yemen's employed children are working in family-run subsistence agriculture. Girls take on substantial household duties within the home as young as eight years old. To augment meager family incomes, a few children work for non-family enterprises such as small urban shops or restaurants. According to 1994 census data (the latest available), approximately 6.5% of Yemen's workforce is comprised of children, most of whom belong to Yemeni immigrant families returning from the Horn of Africa.

According to existing Yemeni labor laws, children under 15 are generally prohibited from working. However, Yemen's current economic distress makes enforcement of the law difficult. If the authorities prohibit many 8-15 year-olds from working, their families, often headed by only one parent, will have no other source of income. Due to a lack of educational opportunities, these children would not go to school, but could end up on the streets, unsupervised and uncontrolled.

There is no evidence in Yemen of forced or bonded child labor, nor of any commercial sex industry in this conservative Islamic country. With half of its 17.5 million population under the age of 15, and an unemployment rate approaching 40%, Yemenis out of necessity accept an "all able hands in any employment opportunity" approach.

Education

High Illiteracy, Not Enough Schools

Overall illiteracy in Yemen is estimated at 62% with 74% illiteracy for females. The gap between the literate and illiterate has remained relatively unchanged for the past ten years as school enrollment rates remain low and the population growth rate remains extremely high, at 3.5%. According to 1997 figures offered by Yemen's Central Statistical Organization, 73% of all elementary-aged school children were enrolled in primary school. By ages 16-18, the enrollment rate for secondary school children dropped to 26%.

These overall enrollment rates figures mask a bigger problem: enrollment of girls at all ages is dismally low. According to the September 1998 National Strategy for Girls' Education, only 37.4% of girls aged 6-15 nationally are enrolled in primary school. Boys' enrollment for the same age group is almost 71%. The gap between male and female enrollment in urban areas is only 9%, compared with a 40% difference in male-female enrollment in rural areas, where the vast majority of Yemenis reside. Low enrollment rates among girls are compounded by high drop-out rates among girls in primary schools.

The National Strategy recognizes that it is insufficient to provide equal educational opportunity, which has existed in Yemen for years. The state must also provide the necessary conditions to allow female students to pursue schooling through the secondary level. Therefore, the National Strategy eliminated school fees and uniform requirements for all public school girls; provided families food and other subsidies to encourage them to keep their girls in school; encouraged more women to take up teaching posts, permitting more girls to study; raised qualitative standards for female teachers; revised curricula to meet the needs of rural girls; and strengthened political support for girls' education.

The ROYG is keenly aware of the need to boost educational expenditures to meet the needs of its youngest citizens and to fund the National Strategy for Girls' Education. Its provisional 1999 budget increased funding for education by more than 5 million Yemeni Rials (\$32,050 at the current exchange rate), which represents an increase of 8.5% over 1998. However, in real terms, because the value of the Rial has slipped by nearly 18% over the past year, the educational sector is actually almost 2% worse off than in 1998.

Although secondary school enrollment jumped by 186% from 1990 to 1998, enrollment in technical and vocational education rose by only 36%, and was only 4% of secondary and tech/vocational added together. Technical/vocational graduates entering the labor force are only 13% women.

At the university level, matters are not much better. In the wake of the Gulf War and return of about 800,000 Yemeni expatriates from Saudi Arabia and Gulf states, the ROYG elected to funnel as many college-aged returnees as possible into the state university system. While they have long since graduated, Yemen's burgeoning population has kept enrollment beyond the system's capacity. Since the early 1990s, Sanaa University has had an enrollment exceeding 100,000 students, overwhelming its available faculty and considerably diminishing the quality of instruction. Mushrooming secondary graduates have kept the pressure on. At present its total enrollment is 120,000, but its faculty totals 1,080 -- everything from instructors to full professors.

Civil Society Widening the Public Space

Yemeni citizens are working to expand their participation in the public sphere, be it the political or non-governmental area. As in so many other aspects of life in Yemen, financial constraints not only hinder the development of civic organizations, but also often produce counterproductive behaviors among leaders competing for limited resources. Government handling of NGOs can be arbitrary, although in general the Government supports activities that further the overall social and economic goals of the state. NGOs devoted to promoting awareness of human rights issues are relatively new and, not surprisingly, garner more scrutiny and interference from the Government than social service groups. Leadership and management training are critical for the development of voluntary organizations.

Brief History

The guidance of Islam and Yemen's rural traditions have long promoted local cooperation and self-help efforts devoted to building mosques, schools, or other public works. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, formal voluntary organizations flourished under British rule in Aden, with the first groups devoted to charitable activities. Gradually cultural, literary and political groups emerged. A number of newspapers, including the first English-language daily in the Arabian Peninsula, published regularly. The Marxist people's Democratic Republic of Yemen essentially eradicated the civil society in Aden and in the south that had existed under the British.

In the north, rural cooperative development societies began in the early 1960s, channeling the private remittances from Yemeni expatriate workers into the building of the rural infrastructure. The cooperative movement reached its peak in the late 1970s. Its very success led to it being co-opted by the national government in the early 1980s, effectively eliminating private funding, which could not be adequately replaced by state monies.

The Constitution guarantees the rights of Yemenis to form NGOs. NGOs are governed by Law no. 11 enacted in 1963, which establishes basic rules for organization and registration and places NGOs under the monitoring authority of the Government, currently the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. The Ministry has the right to abolish a society or freeze its activities by administrative decision or through rejection of no-response to its application for renewal of its license, granted for a period of 6 months to three years. Many associations operate freely and effectively without licenses from the Government. Perhaps the largest problem faced by NGOs is the inconsistent application of existing law and a sense of arbitrary interference by Government. The Government recognizes the inadequacy of the current law governing NGOs, but a draft law before Parliament has failed to pass due to numerous concerns that it could be worse than the current law.

Three Phases of Civil Society Development

The civic landscape of Yemen can be divided into three main phases of development: ad hoc and localized, usually rural, self-help cooperatives (building mosques, roads, etc.); organized local, usually urban, welfare associations that address social problems (literacy and family planning advocates); and associations organized around national political issues (such as human rights and voter registration). The first category has existed since time immemorial and has set the social precedent for citizens taking responsibility for their own environments. A recent independent study indicates that rural farmers and villagers still depend on self-generated civic organizations headed by a trusted member of the community to undertake

local infrastructure projects. This "trusted member" is not, surprisingly, the local shaykh or member of his family. The shaykh's role is dispute resolution not civic projects.

The second type of association seeks to better citizens' lives through change, be it simply charity for the poor or more complicated campaigns to improve public awareness of various social or economic problems. Thousands of these associations exist, many of which are run by women and address issues especially important to women. Reform-minded Yemenis understand that citizens, particularly women, can make the transition to public life via activism in civic groups. They are publicizing the benefits of civil society and trying to develop the institutional capacity of particular NGOs. Although NGOs are taken for granted by Americans, some traditional power bases in Yemen, including the tribal leaders, view civic organizations, particularly in the hands of women, as a threat. They are, nonetheless, an increasingly vibrant part of Yemeni urban society and do provide the best source of leadership training, public exposure and empowerment for women. Unfortunately, most lack leadership that can make them truly effective. The Embassy is focusing on much of the USIS Democracy Small Grants on identifying and supporting the NGOs and to providing training to improve managerial and programmatic effectiveness.

The third variety, associations with a truly national membership and a political agenda, are rare, although from unification in 1990 until the Civil War in 1994, Yemen witnessed the emergence of at least 50 new political parties and dozens of new NGOs that claimed a national agenda. Some observers have noted a tightening of government interference with and control over NGOs following the Civil War. Generally speaking, charitable and welfare associations, many of which address the issues of women and children, face no interference. Others, especially those whose agendas focus on human rights and other areas of possible sensitivity to the government face greater scrutiny. For example, the syndicate of journalists has been nearly paralyzed by charges that the government has packed its membership with government-paid journalists and non-journalists. That said, there is a credible number of human rights/democratization NGOs operating freely in the country and more Amnesty International local offices than in any other Arab country.

"NGI" not NGOs

NGOs suffer greatly from poor leadership development and training. Many a promising NGO has been born, flourished, and died as a result of internal arguments over who may control the association's resources. Following the 1997 parliamentary elections, one of the most promising groups prior to the election imploded when the president of the association refused to hold an election for his successor and in the midst of charges that funds were misused. Yemen has a number of strong "NGIs" (non-governmental individuals), with good ideas and experience in attracting international assistance. These same leaders have less success in building enduring, self-governing associations.

The U.S. and other donors will continue to focus on the goal to improve three areas: capacity building for all NGOs, the development of institutions focusing on human rights and democracy, and inclusion and participation of women in civil society.

Yemeni Humanitarian Demining Program

One of the legacies of Yemen's turbulent political history is the presence of more than 100,000 landmines. Although some date to the 1960's Republican Revolution in the north and the anti-colonialist fighting in the south, most are a result of the 1994 Civil War. By a ratio of 10:1 the mines are believed to be anti-tank as opposed to anti-personnel. Most were laid randomly and in hasty defensive positions. The minefields are rarely marked or fenced. Unexploded ordinance lie within mined areas, but also in villages.

The Government of Yemen was the first country in the Middle East to sign the Ottawa Convention on Landmines and hosted an international conference in 1997 in support of the convention. Since the end of the 7-week Civil War the Yemeni military has exerted considerable effort to remove landmines from its own territory, but has suffered from a lack of technical know-how, equipment and personnel. Data on victims is sketchy at best, but according to some international NGOs, there are an estimated 3,000-5,000 victims in the country, highly concentrated in the areas of conflict between Sana'a and Aden. One small village reports that 30% of its inhabitants have suffered a mine injury.

The concept of an organized humanitarian effort in Yemen began with the establishment in 1995 of the NGO Mine Awareness Association, initiated by the Swedish Save the Children (Radda Barnen). The Association included representatives of UNICEF, UNHCR, ICRC, the Red Crescent Society and the Yemeni Ministries of Public Health, Education and Defense. The focus of the Association's efforts was the Aden area, scene of the heaviest fighting.

In 1998, in cooperation with the USG, the Yemeni National Demining Program was officially established. USG participation is primarily in "train-the-trainers" activities conducted by US military forces and their Yemeni counterparts. The goal is to establish an indigenous demining capability that can sustain itself beyond the end of donor participation. The program is virtually unique in the world in that a civilian-chaired inter-ministerial council provides oversight and policy direction.

There is also a "Friends of Demining" Committee composed of bilateral and multilateral donors and international NGOs. The contributors to date, beyond the US and UNDP are: Japan, Germany, the UK, Poland, Canada, Italy, UNICEF, the World Bank, World Food Program, UNHCR and the NGOs Radda Barnen, Handicap International, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, and Alternatives. The UNDP has established a special trust fund to coordinate donations ear-marked for non-military activities, such as mine awareness and survivors assistance and will second a technical advisor and a logistician to the National Committee.

Both the training of Yemeni deminers and the establishment and activation of the National Committee have been progressing, but there have been the expected "growing pains." Resources, especially personnel, are a chronic issue. The commitment of the Government of Yemen to making this program a success is beyond question, however.

Embassy Sanaa coordinates USG participation in the Demining Program. The US military trainers are under the operational control of the US Central Command. They expect to graduate their last class of Yemeni deminers in mid-June, 1999. The US military trainers will depart at that point, but two civil affairs officers will remain. The USG's lead role in the establishment of the program, the provision of trainers and advisors, and public support for Yemen's efforts is one of the most visible and positive projects we currently have on-going.

Notional Events for Mrs. Clinton

(Not arranged in any meaningful order)

15 min Arrival at Sanaa International Airport

Met by a Yemeni Official to be Determined
Ambassador Bodine

30 min American Community Event at Embassy

45 min Meet President Ali Abdullah Saleh

1 hour Speech at Emerging Democracies Forum
Dar Al-Riaasa

1 hour

30 min Round-table with USAID/Fulbright alums/Reception
“What an American Education has Meant for Yemen”
Location: Wadi Dhahr

2 hours Round-table with Yemeni Women and cultural event
Parliament

1 hour

30 min Dinner/lunch hosted by the President (not yet raised by ROYG)

05/23/99

04:20

202 647 0122

23-MAY-99 SUN 11:28

US Embassy Sanaa (Exec).

FAX NO. 967 1 251 563

P. 1 001

U.S. Embassy Sanaa

facsimile transmittal

To: Watch Officer, Ops Center Fax: 001-202-647-1811 or 647 0122

From: Margaret Scobey, DCM Date: 05/23/99

Re: For First Lady Pre-AdvanceIn Jerusalem Pages: 4

CC: [Click here and type name]

☒ Urgent ☐ For Review ☐ Please Comment ☐ Please Reply ☐ Please Recycle

For Ops Center:

Could you please fax the following scheduled to AmConGen Jerusalem and ask that it be passed to Ms. Evan Ryan, the head of the Pre-Advance for Mrs. Clinton?

Yemen and Israel do not have direct telephone connections.

Thank you very much, Margaret Scobey



EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Sanaa, May 23, 1999

TO: Ms. Evan Ryan
WH Pre-Advance

FROM: Margaret Scobey, DCM *MS*
Amembassy Sanaa

SUBJ: Your visit to Sanaa, May 27

Attached is a notional schedule for your visit here on Thursday.
Please let me know if there are any additions/deletions you would like.

I recommend that the team wear reasonably comfortable clothing. Although we will be visiting sites belonging to the Presidency and Parliament, one site involves walking over slick stones and up steep stone steps. Slacks for the women may be preferable.

I would appreciate it if you could call to discuss the schedule. We are looking forward to your visit.

Notional Schedule for Pre-Advance Visit to YemenMay 27, 1999

- 0300 Met at airport by Admin Officer Howard Van Vranken
Proceed to Sheraton Hotel.
- 0820 Pick Up for Working Breakfast
- 0830 Working Breakfast (Coffee, pastries) at Ambassador's Residence

Embassy Team: Ambassador Barbara Bodine
DCM Margaret Scobey
Admin Officer Howard Van Vranken
PAO Chris Eccel
RMO Dr. Charles Rosenfarb
RSO Bob Conrad
IMO Drew Allison
Political Officer Angela Dickey

Full Team Site Visits:

- 0930 Depart Residence for Site Visits
- 1000 Wadi Dhahr - Potential site for Event with USAID/Fulbright Alumni
The site features an old palace of the Imam and areas where a round-table could be staged. It is about a 30 minute drive from the Embassy. Please wear shoes suitable for walking on slick stone.
- 1200 Presidential Palace - Site of Opening/Closing Plenaries of Emerging Democracies Conference (EDC), where Mrs. Clinton will give her speech. Possible site for meeting with Yemeni President.
- 1245 Republican Palace - To see Guest Villa (sleeps 10) offered to Mrs. Clinton by the Government of Yemen. Another possible site for meeting with Yemeni President.
- 1330 Parliament: possible site for event with Yemeni National Women's Committee and other prominent Yemeni women in government and the private sector.
- 1430 Working Lunch at local restaurant with Embassy Team and NDI and Yemeni officials
- Mr. Derek Butler, local NDI representative
H.E. Mohammad Al-Tayeb, ROYG coordinator for EDC
H.E. Amal Al-Alim Al-Sousswa, Chairwoman of National Women's Committee (ROYG host for Mrs. Clinton)
Dr. Oras Sultan Naji, Member of Parliament (ROYG Host for Mrs. Clinton)
- 1600 Assess Sheraton Hotel site
- 1700 Visit to Souq
- 1830 Return to Hotel
- 1930 Pick-up Pre-Advance Team for Final Meeting with Embassy. Team at Ambassador's Residence. Have bags, passports, tickets ready at hotel for Embassy expeditors.
- 2030 No host dinner at local restaurant

Withdrawal/Redaction Marker

Clinton Library

DOCUMENT NO. AND TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
001. fax	Re: Notes/Questions (partial) (1 page)	05/23/99	P6/b(6)

COLLECTION:

Clinton Presidential Records
First Lady's Office
Eric Massey (Subject Files)
OA/Box Number: 17216

FOLDER TITLE:

Yemen

2012-1036-S

ry1284

RESTRICTION CODES

Presidential Records Act - [44 U.S.C. 2204(a)]

- P1 National Security Classified Information [(a)(1) of the PRA]
- P2 Relating to the appointment to Federal office [(a)(2) of the PRA]
- P3 Release would violate a Federal statute [(a)(3) of the PRA]
- P4 Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information [(a)(4) of the PRA]
- P5 Release would disclose confidential advice between the President and his advisors, or between such advisors [(a)(5) of the PRA]
- P6 Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(a)(6) of the PRA]

C. Closed in accordance with restrictions contained in donor's deed of gift.

PRM. Personal record misfile defined in accordance with 44 U.S.C. 2201(3).

RR. Document will be reviewed upon request.

Freedom of Information Act - [5 U.S.C. 552(b)]

- b(1) National security classified information [(b)(1) of the FOIA]
- b(2) Release would disclose internal personnel rules and practices of an agency [(b)(2) of the FOIA]
- b(3) Release would violate a Federal statute [(b)(3) of the FOIA]
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- b(7) Release would disclose information compiled for law enforcement purposes [(b)(7) of the FOIA]
- b(8) Release would disclose information concerning the regulation of financial institutions [(b)(8) of the FOIA]
- b(9) Release would disclose geological or geophysical information concerning wells [(b)(9) of the FOIA]

05:23:99 04:21
-23-MAY-99 SUN 11:30

202 647 0122

US Embassy Sanaa (Exec)

FAX NO. 967 1 251 583

P. 4 004

2200 Proceed to airport VIP lounge

0010 Friday, May 28, Wheels up via Lufthansa / United 3953

NOTES/QUESTIONS:

EMBASSY STAFF CAN BE REACHED ON 967-1-238-843. HOME PHONES PROVIDED BELOW.
EMBASSY FAX IS: 967-1-238-812

1. PLEASE ADVISE ASAP IF ANY MEMBERS OF PRE-ADVANCE WILL NEED AIRPORT VISAS. ANYONE NEEDING AN AIRPORT VISA NEEDS TO FAX US THE FIRST PG OF HIS/HER PPT WITH PHOTO AND RELEVANT DATA.

2. Please advise if 0830 start is acceptable. Thursdays are official half-holidays in Yemen and it will be difficult to arrange meetings after 1300. Wadi Dhahr closes at 1 pm.

3. Embassy Medical Officer, Dr. Rosenfarb will serve as control officer for White House Medical Unit representative Ashby. We assume he will wish to visit emergency medical facilities in Sanaa. RMO's home phone is: P6/(b)(6)

4. Embassy Security Officer Bob Conrad will be control officer for Secret Service Agent Bohner and will arrange a meeting with host nation security. RSO's home phone is: P6/(b)(6)

5. Acting IMO Drew Allison will be control officer for WHCA representative Dyson. Please advise if any site visits beyond those described above will be needed by WHCA. IMO's home phone is: P6/(b)(6) [0013]

6. PAO Chris Eudel is control officer for Deputy Press Secretary Mason. Please advise if site visits beyond those described above will be needed. PAO's home phone is: P6/(b)(6)

7. DCM Margaret Scobey is overall visit control officer. Please contact her as soon as possible to discuss this draft schedule for pre-advance. She can be reached: 967-1-238-843 (office); P6/(b)(6) (home). Embassy Fax number is: 967-1-238-812.

Final Schedule for Pre-Advance Visit to Yemen
May 27, 1999

0300 Met at airport by Admin Officer Howard Van Vranken
Proceed to Sheraton Hotel

0820 Pick Up for Working Breakfast

0830 Working Breakfast at Ambassador's Residence with
Embassy Team: Ambassador Barbara Bodine
DCM Margaret Scobey
Admin Officer Howard Van Vranken
PAO Chris Eccel
RMO Dr. Charles Rosenfarb
RSO Bob Conrad
IMO Drew Allison
Political Officer Angela Dickey

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0930 Depart Residence for Site Visits

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1245 Parliament—Possible site for event with prominent Yemeni women in government and private sector.

1330 Republican Palace—To see Guest Villa (sleeps 10) offered to Mrs. Clinton by the Government of Yemen during her stay. Another possible site for meeting with Yemeni President.

1430 Working Lunch at local restaurant with Embassy Team and NDI and Yemeni officials

Dr. Abdul Hadi Al-Hamdani, Office of the President
H.E. Mohammad Al-Tayeb, ROYG coordinator for EDC
Dr. Oras Sultan Naji, Member of Parliament (ROYG Host for Mrs. Clinton)
Ms. Rashida Al-Hamdani, (ROYG official assigned to work on Mrs. Clinton's visit)
Mr. Derek Butler, local NDI representative

1600 Visit to Souq

1700 Assess Sheraton Hotel site

1800 Final meeting with Embassy staff at the Ambassador's residence.

(1800) Mr. Bohnert with Embassy RSO will meet with host government security officials

1900 Return to hotel.

2000 Embassy expeditors will pick up passports, tickets, luggage in lobby of Sheraton for advance check-in. For those interested, no host dinner at local restaurant with Embassy staff. Return to hotel.

2200 Pick up at Sheraton for airport VIP lounge. (Possible tour of Presidential VIP arrival/departure facility.)

0010 Friday, May 28, Wheels up via Lufthansa / United 3953

Withdrawal/Redaction Marker

Clinton Library

DOCUMENT NO. AND TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
002. cable	Official Informal (1 page)	04/25/99	P1/b(1)

COLLECTION:

Clinton Presidential Records
First Lady's Office
Eric Massey (Subject Files)
OA/Box Number: 17216

FOLDER TITLE:

Yemen

2012-1036-S
ryl284

RESTRICTION CODES

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Economic & Commercial Overview

Glum Statistics and Grim Prospects

Eighty to ninety percent of Yemen's citizens live below the poverty line. According to 1998 UNDP human development indicators, Yemen ranks 151 out of 174 nations, largely as a result of its meager \$300 annual per capita income, high maternal and infant mortality rates (14 per 1,000 live births and 100 per 1,000 live births, respectively), and high level of illiteracy (62%). Unemployment ranges between 36-40%.

Despite these glum statistics, the Republic of Yemen government (ROYG) remains committed to the program of economic reform upon which it embarked in 1995 under the guidance of the IMF and the World Bank. Since 1995, Yemen has made remarkable progress in achieving macroeconomic stability. The currency was floated and stabilized, triple-digit inflation of the early 1990s was reduced to approximately 6% in 1997 and 10% in 1998, and government subsidies on basic market commodities such as wheat, wheat flour, gasoline, diesel fuel and electricity have either been eliminated (in the case of gasoline and wheat) or significantly reduced. However, Yemen has suffered in the past two years from the precipitous decline in world oil prices and shock waves emanating from the Asia meltdown. Over the past four months, Yemen's currency has dropped in value by 18%, largely as a result of meager rains and the loss of a planting season.

The international multilateral and bilateral donor community, while feeling the growing global pinch on development resources, has continued to support Yemen with over \$2 billion in economic assistance pledges over the next several years. Russia's accession to the Paris Club in September 1997 proved a coup for Yemen's total bilateral debt obligations. Eighty percent of Yemen's \$6.7 billion debt to Russia, primarily for arms purchases from the former Soviet Union, was forgiven outright. The remainder was rescheduled on Naples terms, reducing the debt by a further 67% and refinancing the remainder (approximately \$450 million) for 30 years.

The next phases of economic reform will prove much tougher to implement than the macroeconomic stabilization Yemen has achieved over the past four years. All remaining government subsidies (diesel fuel, electricity, water, sewage, and wheat flour) will be eliminated. The country's inefficient, overstaffed, and often corrupt bureaucracy will be streamlined, appropriately compensated and adequately trained. The ROYG must take action to stem a population that is growing 3.7% annually and that is consuming scarce renewable water supplies at 140-150% of recharge rate. It must create a transparent legal environment that can objectively and independently resolve disputes. Finally, the ROYG must also find a way to extend its authority appropriately throughout the entire country. Handling these issues will require a deft political touch. The tolerance level of Yemen's public for further economic hardship brought through the reform process is beginning to wear thin, leading to widespread demonstrations in June 1998 when diesel prices were last raised.

While Yemen has only meager petroleum and natural gas reserves of its own, from which it derives over 60% of its hard-currency revenues, Yemenis have a long tradition of trading. Most of Yemen's current economic activities focus on trading, rather than on value-added production.

In addition, Yemen's lack of adequate infrastructure sometimes impedes foreign investment. Although the government appears willing to allow private investors to expand Yemen's woefully inadequate electricity generation capacity, the first attempt at a build-own-operate power plant was not successful. Government revenues are insufficient to guarantee commercial power purchase contracts. Outside the electricity sector, the World Bank and other donors are financing road, water and sewage treatment projects.

Nevertheless, private sector investors can still find attractive opportunities in Yemen. U.S., French and Korean oil companies, along with the Ministry of Oil and Mineral Resources, formed a liquefied natural gas (LNG) joint venture to process Yemen's 17 trillion cubic feet of proven natural gas reserves for export. In the port of Aden, a new container terminal owned and managed by the Port of Singapore Authority opened for business on March 19, 1999. Development of the Aden Free Zone presents opportunities for manufacturing companies to process and ship to the Gulf, the Subcontinent, and East Africa. On Yemen's Red Sea coast, the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (TDA) partially funded a feasibility study for a private oil refinery at Ras Issa, north of the port of Hodeidah. The current worldwide refinery glut has postponed any immediate plans to develop the Ras Issa facility. TDA also has partially funded feasibility studies for a 200-bed private hospital in Sanaa, and a cement plant in Bajil, about one hour east of Hodeidah.

Yemen's unique culture, history and geography offer attractive prospects for tourism development. Plentiful stocks of fish and shellfish provide opportunities for packing and export. Stunning coral reefs and the unique flora of Socotra Island offer extensive opportunities for ecotourism. Steadily growing ship trade in Aden provides excellent prospects for skilled ship maintenance and repair facilities. Furthermore, a major component of economic reform is the planned or completed privatization of approximately 100 public sector enterprises.

Yemenis hold U.S. businesses and products in high regard; in 1997 and 1998, the U.S. ranked third among suppliers of imports, after Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. U.S. exports to Yemen rose by 16% in 1998, but still represents less than 10% of Yemen's total imports. Despite the higher shipping costs of U.S. versus European or Asian products, U.S. manufacturers and contractors should continue to benefit from opportunities emerging in Yemen.

Political Overview – Tribal Roots and Democratic Future

Democracy may be the only viable form of government for Yemen. Despite long stretches of authoritarian rule, either under the Imam and the Republicans in the North or the British and the Marxists in the South, Yemenis are fiercely independent and demand that their views be heard – either in a traditional tribal setting or within emerging democratic institutions.

Yemen is not by any means a nation of young Jeffersonians; many of the currently powerful are still unsure of participatory democracy and political rights. But, President Ali Abdullah Saleh and key advisors, most especially his U.S.-educated Prime Minister, Dr. Abdul Karim Al-Iryani, realize that democracy and economic reform offer the only hope for long-term political stability and for improving the quality of life for Yemenis. Perhaps more importantly, the Yemeni people are developing experience in civil society and the expectation of participatory politics. It would be difficult, although not impossible, to turn back the political clock.

Society, Geography and Tribes

Yemen's political and social development reflects its rugged, isolated terrain and its lack of marketable resources. Most Yemenis live in picturesque but inaccessible villages and depend upon animal husbandry and subsistence agriculture. Paved roads connect only the largest towns. While most of the country has electricity, there are few phones and little access to mass media, beyond government-controlled TV and radio. All central governments have been weak, lacking in resources with which to project power into scattered, remote villages. The situation is improving, but some areas remain beyond the reach of government authority.

Yemen's social organization varies from region to region but still reflects the traditional, decentralized tribal-clan structure. Somewhat weakened by external influences, tribal traditions and organization still inform political and social life. Tribal affiliations are particularly strong in the northern highlands of Yemen, where local shaykhs continue to mediate local disputes, often providing quicker, "better" justice than can governmental courts. It is less pronounced in the urban areas and virtually gone in the immediate Aden area, but still provides the overlay. Craftsmen and tradesmen, such as butchers and bakers, traditional judges (qadis) and descendants of the Prophet's family (sayyids) are outside the tribal structure but under the local tribe's "protection." In fact, many of the urban and educated look down on the rural tribal elements as little more than coarse country bumpkins and the shaykhs as a throw-back to another era.

The essence of tribal identity is personal honor – of the individual, and by extension his tribe. Honor requires that the powerful protect the weak, and that an assault on any member of the tribe be viewed as an assault on the whole. Although, or perhaps because, Yemen is one of the most heavily armed societies in the world, elaborate codes of behavior have developed to forestall violence and avoid blood feuds. The seclusion and covering of women stems largely from the fear that women are particularly vulnerable and thus by keeping them separate they are shielded from harm and the tribe avoids potential for violence.

Heavy armed tribes can still engage government security forces in pitched battles...and often are better equipped qualitatively as well as quantitatively. The kidnapping of foreigners has gone on intermittently for years as a way to force the government to respond to a tribe's demand for better public services, such as schools, roads and clinics. The foreigners are always treated as guests of the tribe and inevitably released unharmed.

Tribal structure increasingly overlaps modern political institutions. For example, the paramount shaykh of the Hashid Tribal Federation serves as speaker of the Parliament and head of the major opposition party, Islaah. Many prominent shaykhs or their relatives hold seats in the parliament. One phenomenon worth watching is the extent to which tribal hierarchy adapts and uses the structures of representative government, or resists and is ultimately overtaken by them. Right now the Islaah party, which largely represents conservative and tribal interests, is blocking passage of a local administration law which would devolve authority to the governorates and below. Rather than viewing this as an opportunity to legitimize their traditional authority with an elected title, they see it as a competitive structure.

The Decision on Democracy

Yemen's decision to pursue democracy began in 1990 when the leaders of the republican Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) and the Marxist-Leninist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) agreed to unite on democratic principles. Although public rhetoric and quiet negotiations on unification had taken place over the past decade, the collapse of the Soviet Union, PDRY's patron, undermined the viability of the PDRY and created conditions for unification. Virtually unprecedented, the unification and launching of democratization was agreed to directly amongst the parties involved and without force. Yemen would be ruled by a President, there would be multiple political parties and an openly contested elected Parliament.

The pacific nature of this unification is more remarkable given South Yemen's. For 140 years Aden was a British Crown Colony and sultans in protectorate status ruled the eastern reaches. The YSP's roots lay in a violent, terrorist-style liberation war against the British; it looked to the Soviet Union and the East Germans for political, security and economic assistance; was one of the first states declared a state sponsor of terrorism; assassinated President Saleh's predecessor; supported an insurgency against him for nearly ten years; launched a major invasion at least once; experienced several internal coups with higher casualties than the 1994 Civil War; and, had one of the most dismal human rights records in the world. Further, the South had always and will continue to be at a disadvantage vs. the North in population – there are approximately 7 North Yemenis to every South Yemeni, and most of the southerners are in Aden.

The first free, multi-party parliamentary elections – which included universal suffrage – took place in 1993. It produced a coalition government dominated by President Saleh's General People's Congress (GPC; 40% of the seats) and the former PDRY ruling party, the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP at 20%). The Islamic Grouping for Reform (Islaah), a legal Islamist opposition party, won about 20% of the seats, with other smaller parties, primarily Pan-Arabists, dividing up the remainder.

Southern Discontent - the 1994 Civil War

Although the YSP obtained cabinet seats out of proportion to their electoral results, southern leaders, who totally lacked a democratic tradition, began to feel that the democratic process of the unified country might lead to their eventual marginalization. Aided by Saudi Arabia, these former Marxists launched a civil war in the spring of 1994 to re-divide north from south. The U.S. staunchly supported the unity of Yemen, and President Saleh achieved a decisive victory over the secessionists in just seven weeks. A number of the YSP leadership chose self-imposed if prudent exile. The secessionists have reconstituted themselves as an externally financed, extra-constitutional opposition called the MOWJ.

The remnants of the YSP in Yemen have gone on to self-marginalize itself through a boycott of the 1997 parliamentary elections and an unwillingness to disavow its secessionist and Marxist past. Full integration of the south into a unified Yemen remains a major political challenge. "Carpetbagger" charges are levied regularly.

The Government, for its part, has appointed a disproportionate number of southerners, albeit GPC members, to cabinet and sub-ministerial positions, seeking to keep a "regional" balance in all key government posts. It has also structured the electoral mechanisms for the 2000 presidential elections to allow for a YSP role, despite their lack of any parliamentary seats.

An Immature Political Elite...

Democratization, political pluralism and the development of civil society in Yemen face numerous long-term challenges. These are: an immature political elite, including the political opposition that does not fully understand or appreciate the "ground rules" of the democratic process; high illiteracy rates; and impoverished central government that cannot meet the basic needs of its citizens.

The immaturity of the political elite is a nemesis to democratization. Yemen is a consensus driven society and winner-take-all competition is uncomfortable for most Yemenis. Opposition leaders are reluctant to put their party platforms – and their personal prestige – on the line in an open election. The YSP boycotted the 1997 elections rather than face defeat. The Islaah leadership would prefer to seek a deal with the GPC for cabinet seats than openly contest the presidential election. A supreme irony of the current process is the majority party's increasingly desperate attempts to convince the opposition parties to field a credible candidate against Ali Abdullah Saleh in the October elections. The President and his party understand that a 60% vs. 40% victory in a credible election will have more international legitimacy than a 90% referendum result.

...but A Vigorous Process

Despite these formidable obstacles, democracy seems to be taking root in Yemen. The 1997 Parliamentary elections were judged by international observers to be free and fair. The electoral campaign witnessed vigorous efforts by Yemeni NGOs to encourage registration, particularly among women, and to conduct domestic monitoring of the actual voting. The parliament is as yet no match for the power of the Presidency, but shows signs of developing greater independence. The GPC dominates, but party members on more than occasion have rejected important draft laws they found inadequate or unacceptable. The Parliament also regularly calls for cabinet members to defend legislation and budgets.

The Yemenis are intent upon developing a democratic system that meets international standards, but reflects their own unique history and culture. How they will address issues such as tribal authority and north-south rivalry and suspicions is not clear. Whatever comes out will, however, be uniquely Yemeni.

Population & Family Planning: Overcoming Tradition; Providing Education

President Saleh has indicated his intention to declare the year 2000 as Yemen's year to focus on population issues. In a promising start, the Minister of Public Health already has won support for the concept of child-spacing from the head of Yemen's largest Islamic charitable society. The United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) recently announced its commitment to Yemen of \$18 million over the next four years to support reproductive health and family planning activities. Dr. Nafis Sadik, head of UNFPA, visited Yemen in early May 1999 and strongly encouraged the government to create a parliamentary committee on women in development, urging parliamentarians to contact their counterparts in Egypt, Indonesia and Iran, all of which have led successful population control campaigns through Friday prayers at local mosques, TV programs and other media avenues.

During Dr. Sadik's press conference, she was impressed by the many questions about family planning and Islam. The Minister of Education commented that journalists knew the answers, but wanted to use Dr. Sadik's responses to develop stories on the views of a Muslim woman. The stories likely will be used in conjunction with an upcoming conference in Sanaa of religious leaders on Islam and family planning. Religious leaders from Al-Azhar University in Egypt and Iran have been invited to attend the conference and share their views with their Yemeni counterparts.

Yemen's 1998 estimated population is 17.5 million, which at an annual growth rate of 3.5% is expected to double by 2018. Half of that population is under 15 years of age. The mortality rate for Yemeni children under the age of five decreased from 378 per thousand in 1960 to 100 per thousand in 1998, but this level remains unacceptably high. High fertility rates (more than 6 children per mother, often spaced no more than one year apart) take a huge toll on the mother's health and on her ability to ensure adequate nutrition and care for all of her children, and places the average Yemeni family in severe economic distress as the cost of living continues to rise.

A USAID-funded Demographic Health Survey undertaken in 1997 and completed in 1998 shows that Yemen has made some progress with respect to population control: the population growth rate has declined since 1992 from 3.7% to 3.5% and the fertility rate has declined from 7 to 6.5. During the same period, Yemen's national contraceptive prevalence rate has doubled from 7% to 13%. These indicators illustrate a positive trend, but Yemen still has a long way to go.

Recent U.S. assistance on population issues has been focused on training 220 community midwives, on renovating and equipping 22 maternal and child health/family planning (MCH/FP) units in district health units in the governorates of Hajjah, Hodeidah and Hadhramaut, and in supplying a limited number of commodities, including contraceptives, to those centers. There has been a notable increase in contraceptive prevalence in those areas in which USAID has been involved. However, until Yemen's civil and religious leadership actively and vocally campaign to limit Yemen's family size by spacing children more than one year apart, real progress will be elusive.

Educating Women to Stem Population Growth

Yemen's firmly tradition-bound society holds a somewhat restricted perspective on the role of women in society, including female education. Continued active support by both multilateral and bilateral donors in the areas of female education and reproductive health will be required for the foreseeable future to have any kind of lasting impact on Yemeni society. Those women fortunate enough to have had educated fathers who understand and appreciate the value of educating their daughters have been able to pursue their interests across an extremely broad

academic spectrum, including medicine, law, agriculture and engineering. Their individual and collective impact on Yemeni society, although they are currently few in number, is considerable.

USAID currently is devoting a portion of available pipeline funds for teacher training, focusing on female teachers. Yemen's woefully low female primary school enrollment rate (34.7% nationally) is restricted to a great extent by a dearth of female teachers and adequate classroom (i.e., separate from boys) facilities. Were additional funding available to expand and extend USAID programs in Yemen, primary emphasis would be placed on offering continued support to MCH/FP facilities in rural areas, and to girls' education. Increasing female literacy rates and reducing fertility rates would ultimately improve women's health, economic options, level of meaningful political participation, and improve child health, thereby yielding benefits to the development of Yemen's struggling economy. The return of Peace Corps volunteers to Yemen also would have a marked impact on this Mission's ability to increase female access to education and health care by the provision of female teachers and health care workers in rural areas.

U.S.-Yemeni Bilateral Relations National Interests and National Values

US policy and programs in Yemen support the basic and complementary goals of democratization and Yemen's regional re-integration. After a serious chilling of relations following Yemen's opposition to Desert Shield/Desert Storm in 1990-91, our bilateral relationship has recently begun to improve at an accelerating speed. Corollary goals include cooperation on counterterrorism, population, health and literacy issues and economic assistance. While we have a number of bilateral programs to support these goals, Embassy Sanaa does not have an American staffed USAID presence or Peace Corps at this time.

Yemen sees both its fundamental interests and its fundamental values as compatible with ours. Yemen, as a government and a people, is staunchly nationalistic but also open to continued improved relations with the U.S. The Yemeni government (ROYG) and the people are justly proud of what they have achieved in political and economic reform, and painfully aware of their limitations and the challenges they face.

Democratization: A Core Value

A core value of US foreign policy has been the expansion and consolidation of democracy. Our visible, active and concrete engagement in Yemen's efforts makes manifest not only to the Yemeni people but also to others striving toward democracy the reality of our commitment. Yemen is the only country on the Arabian Peninsula with a functioning multiparty Parliament elected by universal suffrage. It already enjoys an active press, has initiated judicial reform and is crafting local administration legislation. The Government of Yemen has made a public commitment to and requested international donor technical assistance on improvement of its human rights performance, reform of its judiciary, and strengthening of its democratic institutions and civil society, including the empowerment of women.

Regional Integration: A Core Interest

Regionally, Yemen has become a more reliable partner on global and regional issues of importance to us. It continues to publicly support the Middle East Peace Process, to treat Iran with respect but wariness, and to take a more constructive public stance on Iraqi compliance with UN Security Council resolutions. It supports NATO's Five Points on Kosovo and has sent humanitarian assistance to the refugees. Yemen has recently restored full diplomatic relations with Kuwait, severed since the Gulf War. Although their lengthy border remains undemarcated, Yemen and Saudi Arabia maintain an open dialogue and normal relations. Yemen has played a constructive role in international fora, such as the Arab League.

Yemen has cooperation with the United States and others on combating terrorism by taking steps to deny safe haven to international terrorists and by continuing efforts, not wholly successful, to rid the country of foreign extremists. To underscore its commitment to counterterrorism, it has signed and sent to Parliament four international counterterrorism conventions with two more in process. The USG has an active Anti-terrorism Assistance Training program and otherwise seeks to assist and cooperate with the ROYG on terrorism issues.

The US-Yemeni military cooperation relationship has improved at a pace with the overall relationship. Yemen has a model humanitarian demining program financed mainly by the

USG; the US Navy has a bunkering contract at Aden port; we have signed a Defense Fuel Storage Agreement; and there are joint exercises and training opportunities.

The Stakes

Yemen is not a lead player on many of our key regional objectives. It is not one of Israel's neighbors, nor can it directly threaten Israel's security. It is neither a rogue state supporting terrorism nor is it procuring weapons of mass destruction nor is it threatened by a rogue state. And it lacks both critical petroleum reserves and significant market potential for US business. However, Yemen is in a position, to varying degrees to affect key US regional interests.

A politically unstable, ideologically hostile and increasingly impoverished Yemen would create an unacceptable destabilizing factor on the Arabian Peninsula and across the strategic Bab al-Mandeb to the Horn of Africa. A central government unable to expand its authority over the entire country would reopen Yemen as an attractive safe haven to terrorists and other elements inimical to regional stability and safety, and increase the vulnerability of Americans to terrorism and tribal kidnappings.

A stable, prosperous Yemen that perceives a stake for itself in both the bilateral relationship with the U.S. and in construction relations with US regional allies is more likely to support and cooperate on key regional objectives. Yemen's internal stability will depend upon the institutionalization of its democratic and economic reform programs. The U.S. alone cannot assure Yemen's stability; it is important the Yemen be regionally integrated as well.

The Challenges

The challenges Yemen faces, particularly population growth, widespread illiteracy and resource depletion, threaten its efforts toward democratization, economic development and political stability. Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world. Its geographic size doubled in 1990 with unity; its infrastructure is primitive; its modern political history is less than a decade old; and, its population, overwhelmingly rural and is traditionally greater than that of its Arabian Peninsula neighbors combined.

Yemen's challenges are felt most strongly by its women. There is universal suffrage and the right to hold elected office. Yemen has just named its first woman ambassador and there are a number of impressive, talented women throughout the government and in the private sector. At the same time, female illiteracy is approximately 7.4%; the fertility rate is 6.5 and Yemen has one of the highest infant and maternal mortality rates in the world. The Government supports female education, health care, child-spacing and other central women's issues, but lacks the resources to fulfill its commitment. Most donor assistance, including the nominal US programs, is focused on these sectors.

Yemen: Meeting with Prime Minister Abdul Karim al-Iryani

Context

Dr. Abdul Karim al-Iryani is a descendent of a venerable family that has served as advisors to Yemeni governments for several centuries. His uncle was the first president of Yemen following the Republican Revolution. Abdul Karim has served in a variety of ministerial and advisory capacities for virtually all of President Saleh's twenty years in office. Having earned a Ph.D. in biochemistry from Yale as a USAID scholarship recipient, the Prime Minister represents the first generation of Yemeni technocrats. Although legacies are difficult to predict, Iryani's may be his aggressive encouragement of other Western, generally American-educated technocrats throughout the Yemeni government. Iryani has identified, mentored and promoted the next generation of Yemeni leaders, men and women.

Iryani has also been a driving force behind democratization and the economic reform program, either directly or, again, through the cadre of US-educated officials throughout the government. It is because of his leadership that the Emerging Democracies Forum is being held here. As part of his reform agenda, Iryani has been a full supporter of increased women's participation in public and political life. He has publicly chastised Yemeni "patriarchal society" as the root cause of Yemen's lack of economic development and social advancement. He has, for example, mandated that all ministries have at least one woman director-general. It is he who selected Ambassador al-Souswa and Member of Parliament Dr. Oras to serve as your official hosts.

A staunch Yemeni nationalist, Iryani will do what he feels is in Yemen's long term interest. He fully supports and assists in the improvement of the US-Yemeni bilateral relationship, but moves forward cautiously and in full consideration of the broad context. He is lively and engaging and enjoys covering a range of subjects with stunning efficiency and insight.

Areas of Interest

Dr. Iryani will be most interested in your views on Yemen's democratization achievements and prospects. He will want to hear from you as both an American and as a woman of achievement on how to increase women's political participation. As a USAID graduate himself, he will be particularly interested in your evaluation of the prospects for USAID funding beyond September 2000, and the re-establishment of the USAID advanced degree program. A consistent supporter of the Middle East Peace Process, if something of a cynic about the previous Israeli government's commitment to the process, he will be very interested in your impressions from your previous stops in Israel, the West Bank/Gaza and Jordan and your assessment of the new leadership in both Amman and Tel Aviv.

Talking Points

- Pleased to be in Yemen and be able to participate in this landmark forum for emerging democracies. It is right and fitting that Yemen should play host to such a gathering, given your leading role in democracy in this region.
- What Yemen has been able to achieve in terms of political and economic reform is admirable, particularly in given the challenges you face.

- I have been very impressed by the dynamism and commitment of the many Yemeni women I have had the opportunity to meet, such as those I had an opportunity to have a round table discussion with earlier.
- The credentials these women bring to their careers, the time they devote to volunteer work, and their commitments to their families should give all Yemenis hope for the future of the country, and for coming generations.
- Both they and I are mindful of the enormous obstacles facing Yemen – illiteracy, lack of health care, lack of teachers, lingering social pressures. I am also mindful that the US needs to provide more than just morale support. The State Department and USAID are currently examining ways to fund the USAID program beyond September 2000.
- At the same time, we are committed to investing in future generations. I hope that after further assessment we can re-established the Peace Corps and we can also find funding for the USAID scholarship program.

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Biographies

Amat al-Aleem As-Souswa: Former Under Secretary of Information/newly named envoy to Geneva, with the rank of Ambassador. Highest-ranking woman in the Yemen Government, and chair of National Women's Committee, a parastatal NGO attached to the majority GPC. The Committee was the direct result of participation by the Yemeni delegation to Beijing in 1995, led by Al-Souswa. Fluent in English. USAID scholarship alumna, with a master's degree in mass communication from American University in Washington, DC. She was the first female newscaster on Yemeni television. Born 1958, in Taiz, northern Yemen, the youngest of 10 children. Her first role in "civil society" was as the organizer of a Girl Scout troupe in Taiz. She describes herself as the "happily divorced" mother of two children. Dresses conservatively but without the tradition "hijab."

Asma Basha: General Manager of Legal Division, Ministry of Planning and Development. One of the highest-ranking women in Government. Has worked for 25 years at MOPD, where she now oversees internal operations and has responsibility for drafting agreements with foreign governments and international organizations. A former USAID FSO once said that without Al-Basha, "nothing would happen." Born 1952 in Cairo, where her father was the Yemeni Charge', she was educated there from elementary school through university. Worked with the Arab League in Cairo before returning to Yemen and joining the ministry. Fluent in English. Claims to have been "discovered" by USIS, which sent her on an IV to the United States in 1979. (She went without a male escort, something unthinkable at that time.) She attended Beijing in 1995, and is a member of the permanent committee of the GPC, the policy-making body of that party, as well as of the permanent committee of the Women's National Committee. Married with one child. [REDACTED] P6/(b)(6)

[003]

Dr. Oras Sultan Naji: One of two female Members of Parliament. Elected 1997. Born in Aden in 1963. Daughter of the prominent historian Sultan Naji, a specialist on the British colonial period in Aden. Fluent in English. Medical doctor. Like her two sisters, both of whom also have professional careers, she never married. One of the most prominent rising stars—female or male—of the ruling General People's Congress. Renowned for her sense of humor and her unerring sense of constituent service.

Rashida Hamdani: director General, Department of Administration and Labor. Her main job is special Assistant to the Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, within the Prime Minister's Office. Formerly worked for USAID-Sanaa. Fluent in English. Handles several important portfolios, including the Yemen National Humanitarian Demining Program. Born 1949 in a small village outside Sanaa. Received her BA from Alikarah University in Pakistan. Married;

[REDACTED] P6/(b)(6)

Dr. Raufa Hassan Al-Sharki: Professor of "social change, development communications and women's studies" and founding director, Women's Studies Center, University of Sanaa. One of the most visible—and controversial—women in Yemen. Has made a name for herself through operating foreign-funded NGOs and conducting research and cutting-edge programs. (In 1998 conducted a training program in secondary schools to teach girls about puberty.) Born 1957 in the old city of Sanaa. Speaks fluent French and English. Received a BA from Cairo University, an MA in mass communication from Vermont College of Norwich University – sponsored by USAID—and a PhD in sociocommunication from Paris VII University. Her father was a Sharia judge, which makes her position as the most "feminist" of all Yemenis all the more interesting. Never married. Covers her hair in public, but not with the "normal" black fabric—instead she wears brightly colored scarves wrapped in a totally individualistic style. [REDACTED] P6/(b)(6)

P6/(b)(6)

Mohamed Al-Tayeb: Minister of Labor. Prime Minister's designated liaison to foreign donors and NGOs, particularly on issues relating to democratization. He managed technical aspects of the GPC election campaign in 1993 and 1997. He was among those instrumental in pushing the "Emerging Democracies Conference" and is NDI's designated ROYG liaison. Earned MS in civil engineering in US on USAID scholarship.

P6/(b)(6)

P6/(b)(6) Married with 5 children. His wife is the sister of the wife of Ahmed Sufan, Minister of Planning and Development, and the daughter of a former respected Prime Minister. He does not chew qat.

Dr. Abdullah Abdulwali Nasher: Minister of Public Health. Born 1943, Aden. Received medical training in England and Scotland. Fluent in English. Almost single-handedly has transformed the ministry into an agent of change with respect to women and child health, reproductive issues, etc. Married with two children. His wife, also fluent in English, has a PhD in water resource management issues and has continued her profession despite his selection as minister two years ago.

Ahmed Mohamed Sufan: Minister of Planning and Development and Member of Parliament. Former Minister of Industry and president of the General Investment Authority. Born 1958 in Kohlan, a remote village in Hajja governorate. Lawyer and private businessman, educated in the UK and at Sanaa University. Fluent English. Married with four children. As his brother is a USAID alumnus, Sufan is a big fan of USAID scholarship program. He does not chew qat.

Dr. Mutaher Al-Saidi: Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs. Reform-minded minister charged with coordinating and implementing the Prime Minister's ambitious economic and administrative reform program. Is also the chair of the inter-ministerial National Humanitarian Demining Program. One downside: He is saddled with too many portfolios. In 1996 and 1997 headed Yemen's delegations to the Middle East/North Africa conferences in Cairo and Doha. Speaks fluent English and has strong organizational skills but is somewhat introverted, — a "policy wonk" able to see the "big picture." Received master's from Vanderbilt University and a PhD in economics from Penn State University. USAID scholarship recipient. Born circa 1950. Married and has four children. He does not chew qat.

Dr. Abdul Hadi Al-Hamdani: Presidential advisor and Deputy Director of the President's office (equivalent of Deputy White House Chief of Staff). Tasked by the President to handle the "U.S.-Yemeni relationship" portfolio. Also, political director of the GPC and professor of political science, Sanaa University (he has developed a specialty in human rights). Within the Yemeni protocolary structure, treated as the equivalent of a minister. Invaluable embassy contact. Speaks excellent English. BA in law, Baghdad University (but dislikes Iraq intensely), MA University of Houston (USAID scholarship recipient), PhD Cairo University. Born 1948. Married with three children and a ward.

Qat: Not a Drug, But a Social Drag

It is difficult to get an accurate picture of Yemen without taking into consideration the widespread social allure and economic consequences of qat consumption. Qat (*catha edulis forsskal*) is a hedge-type shrub with shiny leaves cultivated largely in the highlands of Yemen and Ethiopia. Its tender young leaves, when chewed and stored in the cheek (resulting in the ubiquitous "baseball bulge"), provide a mildly stimulating, sometimes euphoric effect and a sense of well-being. Western qat chewers have equated the effect to drinking 10 or 15 cups of espresso. There is little evidence to indicate that qat is physically addictive, although some heavy chewers may find it temporarily psychologically addictive. Other side effects sometimes attributed to qat, including oral lesions and even cancer, are usually more directly attributable to applied pesticides that have not been properly washed from the leaves before chewing.

Qat chewing sessions (sometimes euphemistically called "social sessions") generally take place in the afternoons after lunch. Heavy qat chewers chew daily; others limit their qat chewing to Thursday and Friday afternoons (the Yemeni weekend). Large quantities of qat are consumed during celebratory occasions, including weddings and funerals, when the decedent's friends and family gather to reminisce and ponder the meaning of life. Businessmen discuss deals over qat; civil servants and parliamentarians iron out their differences; and students and journalists claim to do their best studying and writing while chewing qat.

Some businessmen and leading Cabinet officials in Yemen privately decry the many wasted productive hours consumed with qat chewing, but at the same time recognize qat's role as a great social equalizer. Qat sessions are one of the few places where drivers and servants often will chew with the head of household and honored guests, offering a valuable opportunity for both better to understand the lives and interests of the other. While some leading businessmen eschew qat in favor of longer, more productive work hours, even they acknowledge that some of their best business deals have been concluded during qat sessions, when all parties are relaxed and prone to philosophical discussion and free exchange of ideas.

Some speculate that the exponential increase in qat chewing over the past ten years is the direct result of Yemen's declining economy: if the average Yemeni had the incentive not to chew qat (read: a better-paying job), fewer productive hours would be spent in costly chews. There does appear to be a rough correlation between higher education and lower consumption of qat; most well-educated businessmen and government officials either don't chew qat at all, or restrict their chewing to weekend sessions. Certainly, for the less well-off, the economic impact of qat is staggering:

- Yemenis spend about 400 billion rials (\$2.8 billion) each year on the qat trade, more than the annual state budget.

- Qat accounts for about 33% of agricultural production, and represents almost 10% of GNP. Since the money generally is circulated domestically, it can provide enough income to keep farmers down on the farm, stemming urban migration. However, no foreign exchange or investment capital is generated, as would be if exportable crops were grown instead.

- Agricultural acreage devoted to qat increases annually at about 14%, usually at the expense of exportable products such as coffee, cotton and vegetables. Land planted with qat is 5 times greater than that planted with grapes and dates; 10 times greater than that planted with bananas, and equals two-thirds of total land planted with coffee and tobacco combined.

- Yemeni families, on average, spend more than 63% of their income on qat.

-- Depending on its quality, qat can cost anywhere between 300 Yemeni rials (\$2) per bundle to 70,000 YR (\$457) per bundle. This, in a country whose annual per capita GDP is less than \$300. The average Yemeni man consumes at least one bundle per qat chewing session; more for ceremonial occasions such as weddings and funerals. (Prompted largely by boredom, qat chewing is increasingly evident among middle- and upper-class women.)

-- Qat chewers, in each session, spend at least 4 hours in social chewing that otherwise might be used more productively.

There is a nascent trend in Yemen to eradicate qat both as an agricultural mainstay and as a part of everyman's daily budget. The Society for Combating Qat is targeting youth and teaching them the dangers and costs of qat consumption. While the Society's efforts are unlikely to yield measurable results in the short term, widespread media coverage its campaign has received lately, coupled with similar calls in the Yemeni Cabinet and Parliament, are giving Yemenis something to think about, or at least to chew over.