

A rare report from Yemen's secret church—'We are turning our fears into prayers'



A former Muslim from Yemen—now a believer living under quarantine outside his native land—shared this rare glimpse inside the troubled country and how Christians are responding in the growing COVID-19 crisis.

A growing deadly crisis

Last week, the United Nations reported that in Yemen, the health system has “in effect” collapsed. Since the first COVID-19 case was confirmed in Yemen on April 10, the UN and relief organizations have warned that the spread of the virus will have a catastrophic impact if the cases are not identified, treated, isolated, and properly tracked. However, in Yemen following through with these measures seems impossible when conflict continues to rage in hotspots around the country.

Three weeks after the first COVID-19 case was confirmed in my native country, additional cases were verified in Aden, the temporary capital of Yemen's Saudi- and Emirates-backed authorities. By May 27, the Supreme National Emergency Committee announced that 256 total cases had been recorded, along with 53 deaths, in areas under the control of authorities based in the south. Reportedly, only 10 cases recovered. Alongside the confirmed numbers of COVID-19 cases and deaths, city officials in Aden reported that more than 500 people died between May

8 and May 16 alone, many with breathing difficulties. Government burial statistics reveal a current death rate of 80 people per day in the city, up from a pre-outbreak average of 10.

A recent Associated Press article paints an accurate picture. The article quotes a gravedigger saying he'd never seen "such a constant flow of dead"— he points out that this is happening in a city that has seen multiple bouts of bloody street battles during more than five years of war.

Yemeni citizens are fearing the terrifying scenarios now projected by international agencies, including the infection of half our population and the deaths of more than 40,000 Yemenis, due to the unmitigated spread of COVID-19.

"There's a lot of anxiety and frustration dominating my neighborhood and social network," says Shoki, a secret believer who lives in the country's northern region. "Many of the people around me are fearful, and there is talk about the tragic way a person with this virus can die, and the suffering of the victim and his family."

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