

Irregular Migration and the Plight of Yemenis in Libya: An Interview with the Yemeni Ambassador



In the midst of Yemen's protracted crisis, now entering its ninth year, Libya has emerged as a key transit point for hundreds of young Yemenis seeking refuge or a path to Europe. With deep political and security divisions within Libya, the country has become a treacherous corridor, where migrants face exploitation by smugglers operating with near-total impunity.

In this exclusive interview, Dr. Hassan Mohammed Al-Hard, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Yemen to Libya, offers a comprehensive account of the situation facing Yemenis detained in Libya: their numbers, conditions of detention, and the dangers they face.

He also explores the socioeconomic and political factors driving this migration trend and outlines possible legal alternatives, highlighting the responsibilities of both Yemeni and international authorities in curbing trafficking networks and safeguarding citizens.

Q: According to the latest data, how many Yemenis are currently detained in Libya? How many have been released or repatriated since the beginning of the year?

Most Yemenis enter Libya irregularly via Egypt and Sudan, reaching the eastern part of the country. The embassy usually learns of their presence only after they are detained by Libya's Department for Combating Illegal Migration (DCIM).

We receive information through relatives, friends, social media, international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), or Libyan institutions and humanitarian groups like the Red Crescent. Often, former detainees provide leads on others still in custody. Naturally, those who enter Libya unlawfully avoid embassy contact, as their ultimate goal is reaching Europe via irregular means.

There are no consistent statistics until they're detained. Every time we complete repatriation procedures, a new group is arrested. From January 2025 to the present, 73 Yemenis have been released and deported. Another 13 will be repatriated this week, while 4 remain in detention and are scheduled for repatriation in early October, pending flight arrangements between Benghazi, Cairo, and Aden.

On September 22, 2025, we learned that a Yemeni migrant drowned alongside Sudanese migrants when their boat capsized off the coast of Tobruk in eastern Libya. We are following up with Libyan authorities through the Yemeni community. Since 2019, four Yemenis have died trying to cross the Mediterranean.

Q: What are the living conditions of Yemenis detained in Libya's immigration centers? Are they receiving medical and humanitarian support?

From our visits either by embassy officials in western Libya or through Yemeni community members in the east and south we can confirm that detainees are generally treated with respect. Libyan authorities understand Yemen's difficult situation and treat Yemenis humanely.

Most government institutions in Libya cooperate with the embassy and the Yemeni community. There are no major obstacles to visitation or deportation processes, particularly for those with court orders or deportation notices. For those without such orders, the embassy or local community provides guarantees to secure their release and eventual repatriation.

Q: Are there administrative or political differences between eastern and western Libya that affect detained Yemenis?

Due to Libya's political division, there are two governments: the internationally recognized Government of National Unity in the west and the unrecognized Government of National Stability in the east. We liaise with eastern institutions through the Yemeni community, given the grassroots nature of their work. In

western areas like Tripoli, we formally communicate with relevant authorities to secure the release or repatriation of detainees.

Libyan officials are generally understanding and responsive to our requests. The embassy and the community regularly visit detention centers, coordinate with DCIM, issue temporary travel documents, and arrange deportation flights.

Q: Does the embassy face challenges in reaching detainees or contacting Libyan authorities in specific regions?

Most Yemeni migrants are young men (aged 20–35) hoping to improve their economic situation by reaching Europe. However, this journey exposes them to significant risks, including exploitation and extortion by human traffickers. Only a few successfully reach Europe; most are arrested and deported.

The risks are severe both on land and sea. Many cross the Mediterranean on dangerous inflatable boats. In some cases, smugglers abandon them at sea or off the Tunisian coast, misrepresenting it as European territory. Survivors often end up detained by Tunisian coast guards.

The phenomenon is growing. Those who succeed encourage others to try, worsening the crisis. Our biggest challenge is accessing detainees in Libya's east and south, where our only channel is the Yemeni community despite the embassy's limited resources.

Q: What are the main drivers pushing Yemenis to risk irregular migration through Libya, despite the dangers?

We strongly discourage Yemenis from entering Libya illegally. Despite the cooperation we receive from Libyan institutions, irregular migration puts lives at grave risk. The embassy's role is to repatriate detainees not facilitate migration to Europe. If migration is unavoidable, it must be through legal and regulated means, both for entering Libya and for traveling to Europe.

We are working to open legitimate work opportunities in Libya for Yemeni expatriates, with proper sponsorship and legal protections in place.

Q: How would you assess the level of cooperation between the Yemeni embassy and Libyan authorities regarding detainee release and deportation? Is there balance between eastern and western regions?

Most Libyan institutions cooperate well with the embassy and Yemeni community, especially in facilitating visits and deportations. Those without deportation orders are often released on embassy or community guarantees. Relevant authorities are responsive and help coordinate with DCIM centers. The IOM has repatriated Yemenis in the past but later stopped, citing its policy against repatriating individuals from one conflict zone to another, as both Libya

and Yemen are considered such areas.

Q: What steps is the embassy taking to protect Yemenis who may be victims of human trafficking or extortion?

The embassy's core mission is to return detainees safely to Yemen—not support illegal migration. We aim to establish new legal avenues for Yemenis to work in Libya through legitimate recruitment channels. We also investigate cases of suspected trafficking or extortion and provide legal and humanitarian assistance for their safe return.

Q: Does the embassy have a mechanism to document missing persons or long-term detainees? What role does the Yemeni community play in this?

Yes, we document all cases of detention and disappearance, submitting regular reports to Yemen's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which then informs other relevant ministries. The Yemeni community plays a vital role, particularly in areas inaccessible to the embassy. They support detainees, supply essential goods, share information, and coordinate with us for deportations. Their efforts also include providing emotional support during detention.

Q: How can diplomatic representation be improved to ensure better protection for Yemenis in Libya?

We face serious limitations, especially in eastern and southern Libya. Strengthening the embassy's financial and human resources is key. Improved communication with Libyan authorities in all regions is also essential. Coordination between the Yemeni embassies in Tripoli and Cairo is critical to stem illegal migration from Egypt into Libya and manage deportations, which often pass through Cairo. Increased logistical and financial support would enhance diplomatic representation and protect citizens from exploitation.

Q: What are the main dangers Yemenis face while trying to migrate from Libya to Europe? Are there accurate records of drownings or deaths since 2019?

The most serious risks include illegal entry into Libya, which leads to legal repercussions, imprisonment, and eventual deportation. Migrants are frequently trafficked, extorted, and sometimes thrown into the sea without safety measures. Since 2019, four Yemenis are known to have drowned in the Mediterranean, underscoring the perilous nature of the journey.

Q: What is your message to young Yemenis considering irregular migration, and what alternatives exist for them?

We strongly urge young Yemenis to avoid illegal migration to Libya. Despite the relative cooperation from Libyan authorities, the risks are enormous. The embassy's role is repatriation not enabling migration to Europe. We advise youth

to seek legal work opportunities, either in Libya or elsewhere. We are actively pursuing legal labor migration frameworks to help Yemenis travel and work safely.

Q: How can the Yemeni government, NGOs, and media collaborate to highlight the plight of detainees and prevent the issue from being forgotten?

This collaboration is crucial. The government must provide greater resources to the embassy to protect citizens abroad. NGOs can spotlight the plight of Yemeni detainees in international forums. The media plays a vital role in raising awareness and exposing violations. A coordinated effort among all three can reduce risks, improve protections, and ensure that detainees' rights are upheld.

Q: Are there steps being taken to document Yemeni migrants' experiences and help them reintegrate upon return?

Yes. We document the experiences of all deportees and submit reports to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In collaboration with the Yemeni community, we help them reintegrate into society, meet basic needs, and access legal employment. These experiences should be used to educate other young Yemenis and inform future protection and awareness efforts fostering a culture of safe, legal migration.